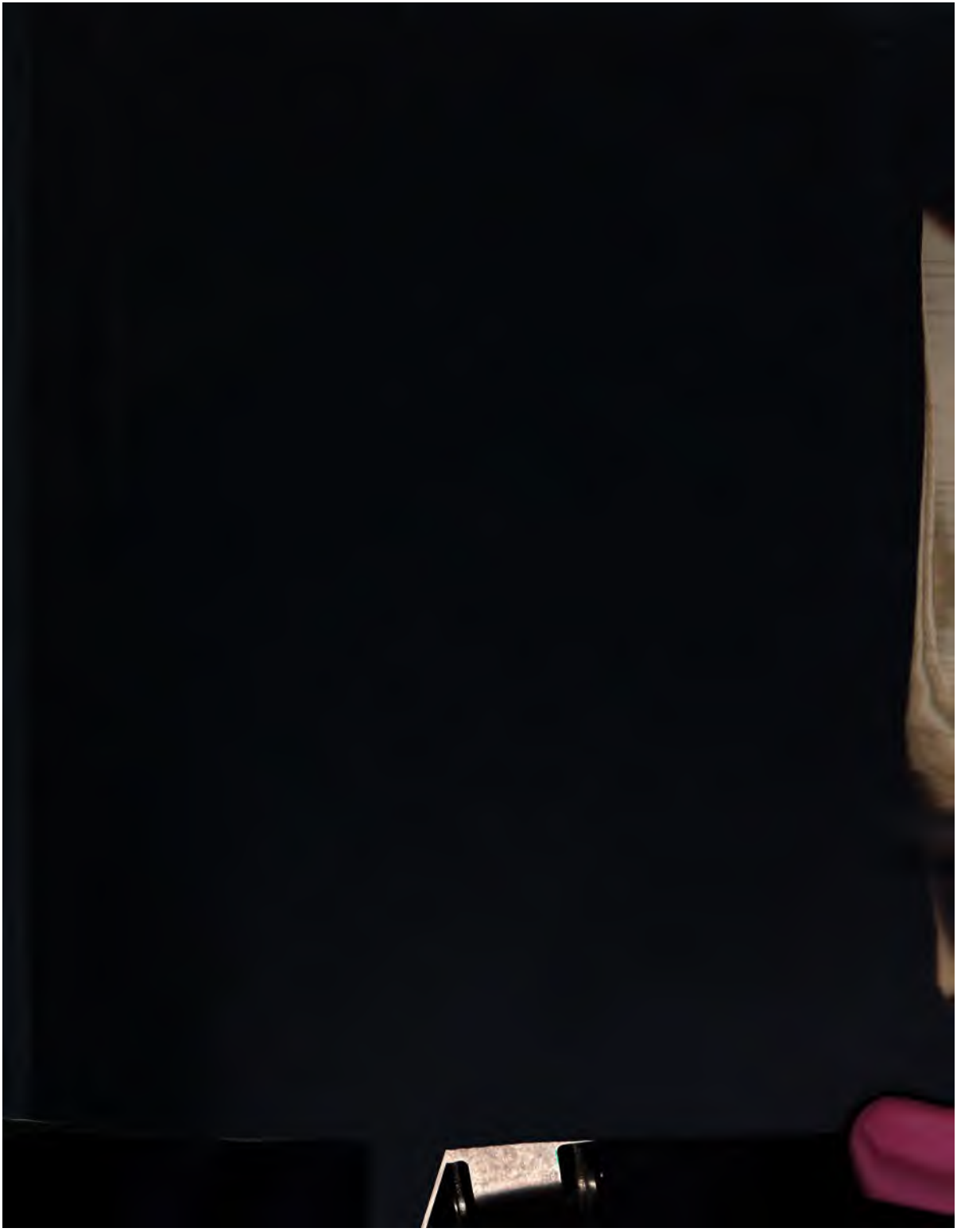
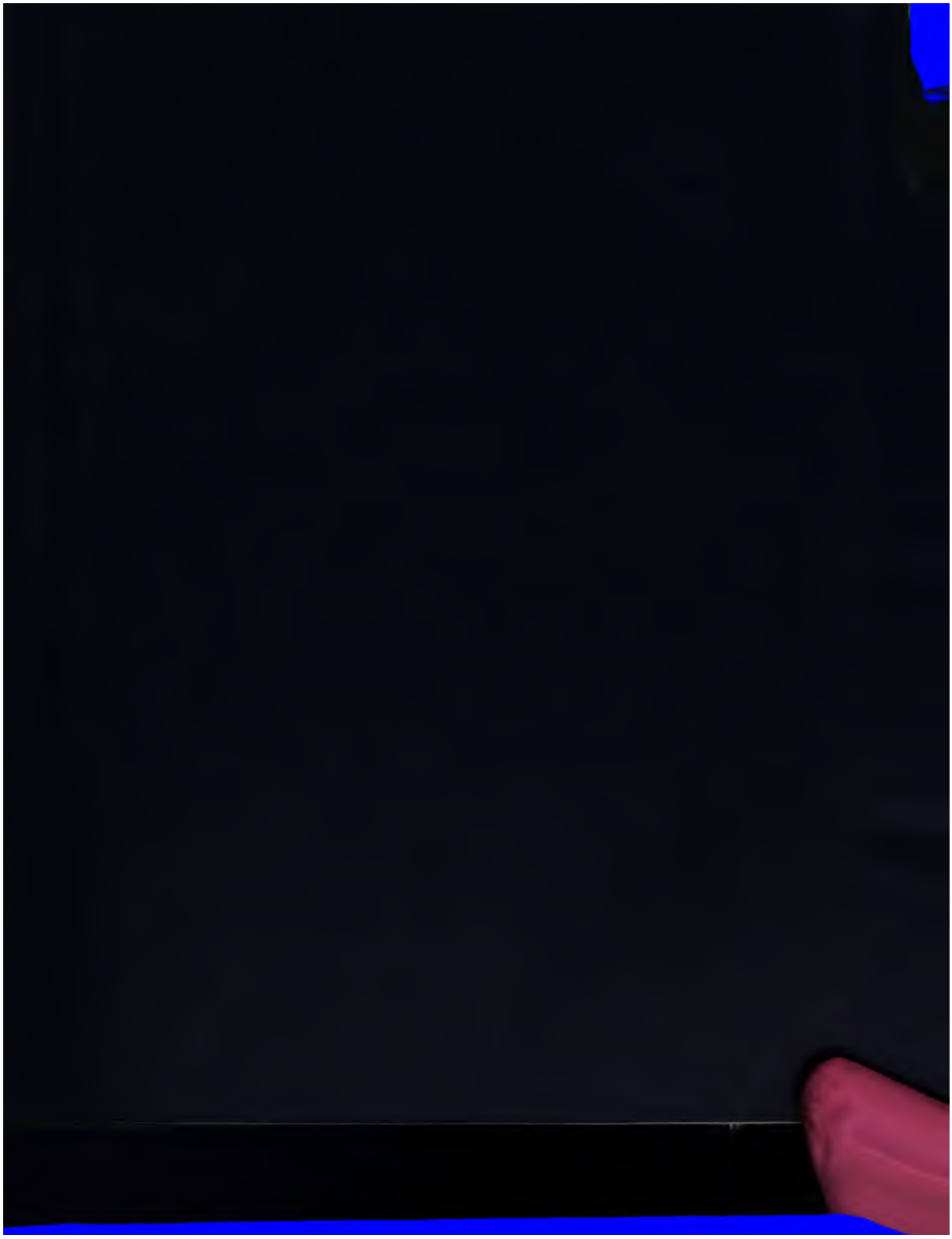
THE GOOD OLD DAYS

A CHRISTMAS UNDER QUEEN ELIZABETH

BY ESMÉ STUART

ILLUSTRATIONS BY W.S. MARKS, A.R.A.





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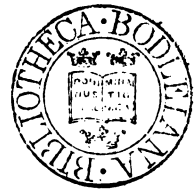
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLORS FROM DRAWINGS
BY H. STACY MARKS, A.R.A.



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THE GOOD OLD DAYS.

CHAP. I.—THE PENNYFEATHERS.

YOU should have seen the great farmhouse on a dewy morning the day before Midsummer Eve in the year of our Lord 1570. It was Master Pennyfeather's farm, and he was but a strange boor indeed who had not heard that worthy yeoman's name for ten, aye twenty miles round Sandhill. The farm itself was called Sandy's Hollow, though who "Sandy" had been even Master Pennyfeather himself could not have told, or whether Sandy had ever been a living man at all, unless indeed he had been a Pennyfeather. Had not that family been in possession of Sandy's farm for generations past, and as no one had ever handed down Sandy's name, did not this show that he had lived before records were kept, and when tradition alone treasured up a man's name in its archives? What gables Sandy's Hollow could boast of! and the black wood-work crossed and recrossed itself on the old walls about as often as the bars of a tartan plaid

The windows were made so as to allow the light and air to come in in moderate quantities, but not one drop of rain could penetrate into the interior. Master Pennyfeather could hear the patter of the rain-drops as they fell from the eaves or poured down through a curious funnel-shaped mouth of wood which served him for a water pipe, but as to rain coming in through the windows, such a thought had never entered the yeoman's head! But why talk of rain so near to Midsummer Eve? In the good old days when Queen Bess ruled the land the weather knew what was expected of it, and held up its head on Midsummer Eve and May Day, for all the folks danced on the green and did not come home till morning. I have not mentioned the roses which had climbed up the gables, or the sunflowers and lupins, nor all the old-fashioned plants which Master Pennyfeather cultivated in the neat flower-garden behind the house—nor have I spoken of the green lawn with its great yew hedge at the bottom, because I hope that by-and-by you will hear all these particulars;—and if not, let your imagination conjure up all these things before you, as Sir Philip Sidney said of the early English stage scenery: "Now you shall see three ladies walking to gather flowers; and then we must believe the stage to be a garden!"

Master Pennyfeather was blessed with a wife, who had endowed him with six goodly children, four of them fine, well-made sons and daughters, worthy of being of the race of Pennyfeathers. His farm prospered, his wife was the soul of neatness and order, and could rule her maid-servants wisely and well; then, lastly, his six children were the joy of his heart. "Pride must have a fall," is an old proverb, and one which the yeoman had ofttimes heard though never taken to heart. His fall had not come, and I am sorry to say that, in what he

considered a harmless manner, Master Pennyfeather was exceedingly proud.

Maurice was his eldest son, but blue-eyed Annys was his first-born. Ben, when my story opens, was a sturdy lad of fourteen, and Eve, with her hazel eyes and white teeth, caused Dame Pennyfeather many an anxious hour. "She was so full of conceits," the good mother would say. The two youngest were twins, by name Prudence and Rachel, fair, delicate creatures, of whom their father would say that they were no true Pennyfeathers, and only sorry damsels. Nevertheless he loved them right well, and would not have them thwarted.

Dame Pennyfeather came of a gentleman's family, but no one had thought it beneath her when she married the rich yeoman, John Pennyfeather. Could not he boast of a pedigree as long as any knight in the shire; and, what is more, he did boast of it, and was never too short-winded when this subject was brought forward.

The family were all assembled now for their dinner in the great room, sometimes called the hall, sometimes the kitchen, and which served both purposes excellently well. Could you have entered Sandy's Hollow on the 22d of June, 1570, you would have seen as joyous a sight as well could be. The table groaning beneath the weight of good things—not only fine joints, but delicacies in the shape of fish, fowls, and pastry. Master Pennyfeather prided himself on the good cheer always to be found in his house; "Whether he be prince or beggar who knocks at my door, there will be always a seat ready, and such viands as beseemeth both:" the father would say, and truly never had either rich or poor been turned from the door. The farm labourers and maids sat at the lower end of the table, below the salt, two of them taking it in turn to serve the whole assembly.

Dame Pennyfeather always enjoined silence and decorous ways at meals, but Eve could no more hold her tongue than a chattering magpie, and knew well besides that her father would smilingly beg for her pardon if she transgressed the rules—indeed he was in no ways loath to hear her merry, though often inopportune prattle. Annys and Maurice, who were considered old enough to speak without being spoken to, seldom made use of their rights, and ate their meals in silence, or listened and assented to what their father said, for the good man seldom held his tongue. This might perhaps be the reason of his sympathy with his daughter Eve.

"Mother! and what kirtle shall Annys and I wear to-morrow at the dance? my Sunday one is neither fine nor convenient enough to dance in," said Eve suddenly.

"I must crave thee to hold thy peace, Eve," said Dame Pennyfeather sternly to her second daughter: but this reproof in no ways disconcerted the young maiden, who looked archly at her father.

"I wot thou wilt look comely enough if thou only go in thy biggen," said the father, laughing heartily at his own wit, and a general titter went round. Eve did not like ridicule: she had no intention of going in her nightcap, and knew that this was a hit at the late hour she had risen from her bed. She therefore turned the conversation by asking in a meek voice:—

"Prythee, Annys, whence got you that pot with the orpine in it? It will wither in the hot sun in the bed-room." Annys turned crimson, and murmured something as to its not being of any consequence, but Eve was glad enough to have made some one else the object of general gaze, and continued unmercifully,

"I should not wonder if it were Jacob Buckston that brought

it. I met him near the barn, and, said he, 'Is Mistress Annys in-doors, pretty Eve?' Hear you that, father? he called me pretty. But I laughed and said, 'Doubtless Annys is with our mother in the dairy.' 'Then,' said he, 'I will leave this plant for her if of your kindness you will tell her that what she inquired after I have procured for her.'"

"Nay, I never asked him for ought," said Annys, looking up quickly with tears in her blue eyes; "and I beseech thee, Eve, have done with thy back-yard gossip."

"And why didst thou ask Annys if thou knew so well?" said Maurice from his seat on the right hand of his mother.

"Peace, children!" said Dame Pennyfeather sternly, though in truth she had not passed over a single word, and stored them up in her mind for future Sunday sermons to her children. Eve should on the next holiday learn the chapter in the Acts of the Apostles which told of Ananias and Sapphira, whilst to Annys she would point out that all concealment was odious and brought undignified blushes on the cheeks of maidens. Master Pennyfeather, however, interrupted her meditations by saying jovially,

"Methinks it was but some young man's frolic; but come, mother, hast thou prepared ought fine for the girls, for the midsummer's dance? It shall not be said that one of my wenches hath appeared dowdy in public."

"They shall have corsets of blue taffeta and skirts to match," answered his wife, somewhat reluctantly, for she had been keeping this a great secret, for fear of turning Eve's head before the eventful hour of robing; "but I would rather Eve went in a meek spirit than in gorgeous attire."

"Marry beshrew me! that would scarce suffice!" and the yeoman shook with laughter, enjoying his wife's increasing gravity.

"Come, sweetheart, thou too must appear finely decked; promise me that I shall drive thee arrayed in cramosy."

But the worthy dame was not to be laughed into good temper, when her sense of decorum was ruffled. Eve was becoming a sore trial to the good mother, who saw in her daughter's levity of disposition much that would cause her anxiety. This day Eve was quite irrepressible.

"If the pastor had his way I fancy Ben would remain at home to learn his Greek and indite his Latin theme. Conceive, father, what the pastor said."

"Aye, what said he?" Ignoring her mother's frown, Eve answered promptly,

"Why, that Ben should pluck those most godlisome herbs of learning whilst he was yet young; that he might then chew them by musing, so as to have them laid up in the granaries of his mind! Ben, why art thou kicking me under the table; mother is ever saying our feet should not stray during meals."

"Thou shouldest ask the pastor to teach thee thy catechism," said Ben surlily, for he and Eve were for ever sharpening their wits against each other, much to the gentle Annys' sorrow, for she indeed was a true peacemaker by nature, but found it a difficult task with these two.

"Nay, but I know it right well by heart, and besides thou knowest the pastor is a Puritan and will not teach 'those most mischievous words'—" and Eve mimicked the pastor's voice so cleverly that the maid-servants hid their faces in the ample strings of their mufflers, to prevent their mistress seeing their laughter. Happily for them Dame Pennyfeather rose and asked Maurice to say the grace, which he did in Latin, this fashion having not yet died away. Maurice was now at home for a

short space before going to Oxford, after which he was to take holy orders. He was a quiet, studious youth, and had never given his father or his mother an hour's trouble. He and Annys were very fond of each other, but both were of a shy, reserved character, so did not mutually confide their troubles. Maurice indeed had very few to talk about, for he always did what first came to hand (if it was in the way of his duty), and as he gave his whole mind to his occupation, no matter what, he found little leisure to pick up troubles. Whilst at home indeed he felt that Ben and Eve did not contribute to his mental advancement, but he bore with them patiently, and looked forward to his Oxford career, when he might study as much as he liked.

With Annys it was far otherwise. She was always worrying herself about her duties. Her conscience was so tender that it left her very little peace of mind, yet she was so timid that she dared not take counsel with her mother, or open her heart to her. This we shall presently see was the cause of much trouble to the gentle maiden, who was the pride of her father and the right hand of her mother in all household matters.

The forenoon was spent by Eve and Ben in preparing their lessons for the next day, and by Annys in teaching the twins, but the lovely summer evening was given to each to spend as they thought fit. Maurice would wander out in his father's fields with a book, Eve and Ben would take long rambles within the domain, and Annys would sit in the garden spinning or knitting.

This same evening Eve came back in time for supper with her dress torn, and looking like a wood maiden. She had a large bunch of "forget-me-nots" in her hands. Ben had not yet returned, and Annys shook her head, smiling as Eve approached the house.

"Ah! sister, what a sorry plight thou art in! I will come and help thee change thy dress, for supper will eftsoons be served up."

"Annys! Annys! you should have seen the peril I went through to procure these—will they not look lovely in our hair to-morrow evening? See this bunch is for thy sweet head; and ah! Annys, I will tell you as a great secret that after dinner I went on tip-toe to our mother's room, and there on the bed, as I guessed, lay our corsets and kirtles—such a blue of heaven, and so I determined to get these posies. I know, Annys, what will be said of Master Pennyfeather's eldest daughter!"

"What, then?" asked Annys blushing; but happily Eve did not see her, for her sister was leading the way up to their bed-chamber.

"Surely this!"—and Eve sang out in a merry voice—

"Annys is a darling
Of such a lively hue,
That whoso feeds his eyes on her
May soon her beauty rue."

Annys was glad to be able to laugh and thus hide her confusion, as she answered with unwonted raillery—"And of thee they will sing,

"Eve is comely, and thereto
In books sets all her care,
In learning with the Roman dames
Of right she may compare."

Eve pouted a little, but as the great horn sounded in the yard in order to collect the farm folk for supper, she had not time to find a witty repartee.

Before retiring to rest, and as they were assembling for family

prayers, Eve came up to her mother with a meek face and sober demeanour.

"Prythee, mother, I have a petition; grant it, sweet mother.'

But Dame Pennyfeather was not to be coaxed into saying "yes" without hearing the request.

"I would fain not learn any lessons to-morrow. Surely the pastor need not come. Ben, what sayest thou?"

Ben cordially assented this time to his sister's petition.

"I marvel at thee, Eve, after thy levity this day asking such a thing. At thy age I would have disburdened my heart by double study. Certainly the pastor shall not be hindered from his labour of love," was the mother's answer.

"Father pays him right well," said Eve, who would always have the last word. "I heard him say so to farmer Buckston, when he was bemoaning the poverty of the Puritans."

Dame Pennyfeather, who could not so readily find an answer as her daughter, stopped the argument by telling Annys to fetch the maids and men to prayers.

CHAPTER II.—MIDSUMMER EVE.

MIDSUMMER EVE! The flowers seemed to say it, as they waved their heads in the early summer breeze. The gilly-flowers in a favoured spot of the garden had been eagerly watched by the Dame, for these and the bright carnations were new importations, and she wished all the household to have one of these choice flowers on their person at the dance. Ben had got up with the lark to see about the piling up of the bonfire, an indispensable part of St. John's Eve, though, as the weather was fine and warm, this was scarcely needed. The maid-servants had decorated the whole house with branches of birch, and had placed large nosegays of lilies in coloured jars in the rooms, and were at the early hour of five bustling about to get their work done, so as to be allowed to betake themselves in the forenoon to the village, from whence the "Marching Watch" was to set out; indeed, Amelia Sopp, Dame Pennyfeather's own maid, had been privately asked to represent "Maid Marian," and having as privately accepted, was now in an agony of mind for fear of any accident detaining her. She secretly knew that her mistress would much object to her taking a share in a public show.

"Annys, Annys, bestir thyself!" called out Eve at six o'clock in the morning. "I would not have thought thee such a lie-a-bed.

Thy needfullest fingers are sorely needed now. If it were not for the pastor—beshrew him!—and for his vile Latin, I would weave the most comely wreath for my 'nut-brown pate,' as father calls it."

"Fie, dear Eve! what would mother say to hear thee abuse the good pastor, and scoff at his marvellous book-craft? Besides, he will have nought of to-day's pleasuring. He thinks it but a vain and sinful custom, somewhat savouring of Popery."

Eve tossed her head, and quoted the then common saying, "The bear wants a tail, and cannot be a lion! He liveth ever in his texts, and careth not for our sinful sports."

Annys had by this time got up and had approached the window, where stood the pot of orpine. The two plants were slightly withered, but were bending towards each other. A smile lit up her face, which was seen by the lynx-eyed Eve, who was glad to be able to ask about the orpine at her ease.

"What fantasies have taken hold of the sober Annys' head? I never before saw thee disposed so lovingly towards flower-pots. Come, confess it was Jacob who sent it?"

"An' it were, what then?"

"Ah! I can tell thee what then! Father would break his puritanical bones for him, and as to thee—!" Eve made a wry face, and went skipping downstairs singing—

"And yet I daresay
She thinks herself gay
Upon a holiday."

At nine o'clock appeared the Rev. Mathias Hapgood, who, out of courtesy, was called "the pastor" by the family of Pennyfeathers. Before he has time to make his way in, I must say a few words about this pastor who had neither cure nor sheep! He was a young man with a living worth £5 in the reign of Henry VIII.

At that time he had been ejected on account of his Catholic principles. He then retired to Switzerland, learned French, changed his opinions, and returned home in the last year of Henry's reign. Some kind patron had presented the now thoroughly Protestant minister with a living worth £20, but hardly had Queen Mary ascended the throne, when the Protestant clergy found themselves in no very enviable position. Mr. Hapgood again resigned, and wandered about the country till Queen Bess proclaimed herself of the Protestant religion. Mr. Hapgood was happy enough to get back his living, but alas! he had now protested so long, that he had far exceeded the queen's ideas of a good Protestant, indeed—he himself did not deny it—he was a Puritan. In 1558 the Act of Uniformity was passed, which enforced all the services of the Church to be conducted in the manner prescribed by the Prayer-book. Now the Rev. Mathias Hapgood had quite given up following the Rubric, and his conscience would not permit him to take to it again, so once more he found himself cast adrift on the world. Happily, Master Pennyfeather came across him, and as no one could say a word against *his* orthodox principles, the good yeoman took compassion on the poor wanderer, and engaged him to come daily and teach his children, on the one condition, that the pastor should not fill their heads with Puritanical ideas. The conscientious man had answered, "that what he was inspired, that he must teach," upon which the jovial yeoman had said—

"Go your ways, Mr. Hapgood, and work your will; you will never convert a true Pennyfeather, and I won't deny that it will be inspiration if you put anything into the thick pate of my son Ben!"

A small room on the ground floor was set apart for the

pastor's scholastic duties, and here the worthy (though narrow-minded) man went through a daily martyrdom with the wild Eve and the dull Ben. He was in truth far too good to them, for he never got impatient, but when sorely tried he became very argumentative, and quoted Scripture. He seldom found that the Latin verbs were the better for it, but he put it down to his own want of eloquence. He came in on this Midsummer's Eve as calm as if it were a day in Lent, and took no notice of the children's excitement. Annys would generally come in for half an hour to improve her French, and when this hour came round, the pastor asked why Mistress Annys was not forthcoming. Indeed, he always hailed her appearance, as she was a check on Eve, who feared her mother would hear of her careless inattentive ways and pert answers.

"She would be right well pleased to come, but she is busy making pasties for the feast to-night. Know you not that this is St. John's Eve?" asked Eve, preparing to defend her most favourite saint.

"Aye, I know right well that there are misguided souls who are this day going to celebrate the Pagan fires offered to idols. It passeth my understanding how such wickedness remains unpunished."

"There will be three fires," said Ben, volunteering the information, "a bone-fire, a wood-fire, and St. John's fire. The first is to drive away dragons and diseases, and the bones are those of St. John himself."

"Nay, Ben, it doth but represent his martyrdom, mother says!"

"Horrible Popery!" murmured the pastor.

"You should see the procession which starts from the village.

No beholder can keep from clapping his hands when Robin Hood and Friar Tuck pass by. And know you, Ben, there will be morris-dancers come expressly from London?"

"I shall have infinite pleasure in keeping within doors," said the pastor, "and turning my countenance toward better sights."

"I wish you would take Annys to task," said Eve, who had forgotten she was about to read French, "I know she has in secret collected herbs to throw into the bonfire. If they burn up brightly, then her lover—but she has none as yet—will keep faithful; if not, he will turn sour. Call you not that superstition, good pastor? *I* would not do so, but would leave it for the silly maids."

"As if any would love thee!" quoth Ben, contemptuously; which remark had the effect of making Eve resume her reading. Not, however, before the pastor had lifted his hand and eyes and murmured in a very audible whisper,

"Gog and Magog!" But the children did not know to whom he referred, or whether it was his manner of denouncing the wickedness of the world. The pastor's personal appearance, about which I have said nothing, can best be explained by asking the reader to have a telescope in his mind's eye. Each part which made up the perfect whole of the pastor's body, seemed to be drawn out or pulled in at pleasure, and he was so thin that his clothes could not be said to fit, but simply to hang on. He dwelt in a single small room, over a butcher's shop, in the village of Sandhill. Had it not been for Master Pennyfeather's frequent invitations to dinner and supper, the poor pastor would seldom have tasted any of the beautiful joints which he daily set eyes on, as he passed out of his room. The good dame, too, was very kind to the needy Puritan; in her

heart she rather sympathized with his opinions, though she would not for the world have owned such a thing, for her lord and master would never have forgiven her.

It was a happy release for both master and pupils this day when the clock struck eleven, and they were summoned by Annys to come to dinner before they prepared themselves for the important drive to Sandhill. Ben and Eve needed no second call; off they flew like birds released from their cage, and began dancing about the hall to practise, as they said, the complicated steps of the new dance that Annys had taught them. The twins, who always went about hand in hand, and were in great awe of Ben and Eve, retired into a corner whilst this war dance was being performed, but it was soon put a stop to by the blowing of the horn and the entrance of the household, headed by Master Pennyfeather leading in the pastor.

"Come, come, good sir, you shall eat a mouthful with us, and then join us in our sports. The young folk are tingling all over with impatience. We will find a corner for you in our waggon."

"We cannot ease ourselves of our griefs by beholding such vanities," answered the worthy man. He was then begged to say grace, which he did by composing a somewhat lengthy prayer, during which Ben looked out of the window, and Eve prepared herself in imagination for the coming festivity. Maurice, who went through everything he undertook with his whole mind, was now talking eagerly about the dance on the green, saying that if Annys had no partners he would take pity on her and trip it once or twice with her.

"And with me too, Maurice," asked Eve. "Ben always finds out some other partners and will have none of me."

"'Tis because I dance with the prettiest," returned the lord of creation, who knew that Eve was proud of her pretty features, and wished to lower her ideas!

"It beseemeth not one so young to talk of beauty," said the pastor, who knew Eve too well to be at all softened by her arch looks; "it is a thing of the present, a vapoury cloud which a mere breath of wind will cause to disappear, a snare of the devil, and a stumbling-block in the path of even the most virtuous."

"Then I would rather not be too good," answered Eve demurely, but received such a look from her mother that she thought it more prudent to hold her tongue during the rest of the meal.

Master Pennyfeather discussed many things with the pastor, such as where his next discourse was to be preached. This was a subject of constant amusement with the yeoman, and of secrecy with the pastor, for the out-of-door meetings of the ejected Puritans were much discountenanced by the Queen. The pastor always parried the joke for some time, but before the end of the meal he was sure to let the cat out of the bag, whereupon Master Pennyfeather laughed heartily.

At last the meal was done, the pastor excused himself from the forthcoming festivities, and Eve darted to her bedchamber, where Amelia Sopp, fully as impatient as herself, was waiting to help her. Annys followed her sister more slowly; her head was full of other things besides her attire and her good looks, though I would not be so bold as to say that neither of these ideas formed part of her meditations.

"Ah! Amelia," cried Eve, in a great state of excitement, "I am wild to arrive at the green. First there will be the archery trial; Maurice and Ben will both try their skill at it.

My private opinion is that Maurice will not show from what ancient lineage he comes, he is so awkward with his hands. Knowest thou, Amelia, I would willingly be one of those happy persons who form the procession. If I were my own mistress I would dress up as Maid Marian, and my lover should be the friar. Would not that suit thy fancy also?" Poor Amelia blushed painfully; she thought Mistress Eve had found her out, when in truth it was but an unconscious shaft. Eve was quick enough to see the maid's discomfiture, and would have pursued her inquiries if Annys had not at that minute entered the room.

"Prythee, Annys, what is the matter? Thy face is full of dolour, one would say thou wert going to a funeral. The pastor told me yesterday that I had bedizened myself even as Jezebel, but I would rather look like her than like a hired mourner!"

"Our mother says we must not linger, for father will never like us to be late."

"Well, I am ready, Annys, sweetheart. Arrange my flowers for me, and I will do the same by thee."

Very soon the whole family were packed into a rude sort of conveyance, and were jolting along to the village green of Sandhill.

It was a beautiful day; white clouds were floating in the blue expanse; the hedges were thick with green foliage, and at their feet wild flowers were poking out their heads as much as to say that they too wanted a share of the general admiration. Eve, Ben, even the twins and Maurice, were in high spirits, and allowed the dame and Annys to represent the sober part of the family, for the good yeoman was the merriest of the party. On all sides the peasants could be seen hastening to the village. They were arrayed in their best clothes, and the pretty skirts,

bodices, and head-dresses made a lovely picture. The village of Sandhill was situated on a small river, which not far from there emptied itself into the sea. Half the houses of the village were on one bank of the river, and half on the other; a rude bridge spanned the water and joined the two portions of the hamlet. This bridge added greatly to the picturesque appearance of the place, but I am sorry to say it was the cause of a good deal of bad feeling among the inhabitants, for there was a decided rivalry between the two sections. If the right bank expressed a decided opinion on any subject, the left immediately loudly proclaimed a contrary one, and *vice versa*. Even on this public holiday the village had not been able to agree as to the spot where the bonfire of bones should be placed. This emblematic heap was much coveted by each party; indeed, this year, they had strongly advocated having two separate bone-fires, but as such a thing had never been done before, there was a loud outcry raised by those who were of a superstitious turn of mind. The village green was situated at a little distance from the right bank, and as they could not divide this piece of land, the villagers agreed to keep the peace with regard to this "bone." The left bank could not but acknowledge that it would be very inconvenient if at any time their pride caused them to refuse to dance on their famous village green.

When the Pennyfeathers arrived, the games and sports had already begun. Young men were running races, and in another spot archery was going on. Peals of laughter could be heard if a runner fell down or retired from the course for want of breath, and still greater merriment was caused if some unpractised archer sent his arrow behind him or over his head, instead of at the required mark. The green, on one side, was shaded by a

row of fine elms, and under the shadow of these the well-dressed dames and maidens were sauntering about, having not yet forgotten that they had on their best clothes. It was to this spot that Dame Pennyfeather conducted her two daughters, whilst the boys went off to seek the amusements which best pleased them. Eve was not quite satisfied at this arrangement, but comforted herself by thinking how much better dressed she and Annys were than the rest of the maidens. Indeed the two sisters were a pretty sight. Their short blue skirts, neat ankles, and trim figures, attracted a good deal of attention, but as yet not much admiration, for no young men were of the party.

"Mother, I would fain go nearer to the archery," sighed Eve, when the subject of dress had been fully discussed; "it is very dull here, one might as well be at home."

"Thou must curb thy desires, Eve," returned her mother, "the dancing will soon begin, and then thou wilt stay by my side till thou art bidden; remember thou art now a big girl."

Eve liked to be considered on the high road to being "grown up," but did not like the restraint this implied. Last year her mother had let her go about with Ben, and she would have liked well enough to seek him out now; however, she dared not ask this. Annys came to her help like the kind sister that she was.

"Dear mother," said she, "if thou wilt walk round this way, we can station ourselves very near to the shooters and see the sport, whilst there will still be shade for thee." Dame Pennyfeather assented, especially as she saw the minister's wife and daughter wending towards that spot.

"See you Mary Peckham, mother? Is she not dressed like a paynim with that white head gear?"

"It behoves thee not to remark on thy neighbours, Eve; when wilt thou learn to control thy tongue?"

"It is such an unruly member, the pastor says, that I doubt me whether it will ever be controlled. Ah, look, look, Annys, there is Maurice going to shoot!" Maurice had indeed taken a bow in his hand, and had made a great fuss about placing himself according to rule. He bent his bow, adjusted his arrow, and pulled the string up to his ear. The arrow was loosed, and Maurice stared with all his might at the aim, which was a wooden bird set up on a pole. He was still looking, expecting to see the bird fall, when a burst of laughter made him turn round. By some wonderful twist of his bow he had caused his arrow to fly straight upwards, and had he not turned himself it would have descended on his head. He burst into a hearty laugh, which caused the whole company to think him a "right goodly and well favoured young man," worthy of being a Pennyfeather. The twins, who were holding each other, and also clinging to their mother, remarked how clever Maurice had been, and then Rachel, pulling her mother's gown, said plaintively, that the sun had made her head ache. Dame Pennyfeather was somewhat embarrassed, but as the little girl began to cry, she said she must take them to a booth, which was the other side of the green.

"Annys, thou must stay here with Eve till I return, or shall I ask Mrs. Peckham to have an eye on you?"

"Nay, mother," answered Annys, "I will not stir, and thou, Eve, say thou wilt stay with me?" Eve was so busy watching the shooters that she did not, or would not hear this remark, and the dame did not tarry a minute longer.

"Annys, look who is now going to take the bow: thinkest thou he will strike down the bird?" Annys had already seen

Jacob Buckston step forward: she almost thought she saw him cast a glance towards their side, but could not be sure. There was an expectant silence, the crowd seemed all at once hushed, as each eye was bent upon the tall young man who stood alone preparing to shoot. He was dressed in green, except some high leathern boots or gaiters, which were buckled in at the knees. His green surcoat was also strapped in at the waist, and his attire was completed by a tall broad-brimmed hat, beneath which his dark handsome face could be seen. At this moment his lips were compressed, his whole mind seemed bent on one object, and this was to bring down the bird, which as yet no one had dislodged. Annys held her breath, and as Jacob drew the bow she shut her eyes. In an instant her arm was seized by Eve, who exclaimed,

"What a lack of courage thou hast. Ah, thou didst not see!" Then a loud cheer arose, and Annys, looking where the bird had been, saw that it was there no longer.

"Eve, I do not believe there is such another marksman in the country," she said eagerly; but looking to see why Eve did not assent, she found to her horror that her sister was no longer at her side. The crowd had increased, and she was alone. What would her mother say? but Annys had promised to stay in the same spot, and she would not break her word. Still she felt vexed with Eve, who was so thoughtless that she had not minded leaving the timid Annys alone on the green.

"What shall I do?" she said aloud, and unexpectedly she received an answer. There was no need to look up and see who it was, for Annys knew the voice quite well. She knew Jacob Buckston stood near her, and was keeping off the crowd from her by just holding out one of his arms as a bar of protection.

"Why is Mistress Annys alone?" asked Jacob, with just a little surprise expressed in his voice.

"My mother was forced to take Rachel to some place of shelter from the burning sun, and Eve has left me; she is so young that she did not wait to consider."

Annys answered in the same tone as she would have done had her mother or the pastor asked her this question: unlike Eve she could never alter her look and tone. Nothing but a little nervousness of manner showed that she was agitated.

"Shall I be the bearer of a message to your sister?" asked Jacob.

"I would indeed feel beholden to you if you would tell her to return, and that I think her little careful of my safety."

"Nay, naught can harm you whilst I am here, though I would not that you should be seen alone and unprotected." Jacob said the words very seriously, and Annys feared he was displeased. This made her still more miserable, and almost inclined to cry. The crowd was dispersing, and moving towards the centre of the green, where a ring was already forming in preparation for the dancing. Annys felt even more frightened, for she thought she saw her mother in the distance. She made a great effort, and said imploringly, "If you would kindly leave me, there can nothing befall me now. Everyone is gathering for the dancing, and you will be required to foot it with . . ."

"Shall I conduct you to your father?" asked the young man, who evidently did not wish to leave Annys there alone; "I think I can discern him out yonder."

"Nay, nay, though I thank you from my heart. I promised to stay here, and I needs must. Only, if you see Eve, bid her hasten to me—but I pray you go." Annys really did see her

mother, and dared not be found talking to Jacob. This latter took the hint and turned his steps towards the central ring. Annys shed a few tears when he was gone. She had looked forward to meeting him, but not in this way; she fancied he would have asked whether she had received the pot of orpine. Perhaps after all he had not sent it, and then Annys blushed at her own foolishness. It was not often that Annys saw Jacob Buckston, though his father's farm joined the domain of the Pennyfeathers. Less often, too, had Annys spoken alone with Jacob, yet she believed from various little trifles that he loved her. Annys was too true to hide even from herself that she was not indifferent to him, and, as we have seen, Eve had nearly divined the secret. That pot of orpine, which yesterday she had believed he had sent her, had filled her with happiness, but now all was changed. He had not seemed pleased, nor had he said one gentle word. It was all because he had found her alone, and because she had kept her promise and remained standing where her mother had told her. The dame now came hurrying up, looking worried and a little out of temper.

"Annys! how comes it thou art alone? It is most unseemly. I wonder thou didst not keep with Eve! Where is then the madcap?"

Annys did not dare tell her mother how Eve had left her, so happening at that moment to see the runaway standing next to her father, she pointed her out to the dame, adding,—

"I stayed here thinking thou wouldst not have found us otherwise."

"Thou hast very little common sense! At thy age thou shouldest better judge what is seemly; but come, the dancing has begun, and by thy foolishness thou wilt have missed one

dance. The folks say that young Jacob Buckston brought down the bird at the first attempt; for my part I think Maurice's the cleverer hit." Annys could not agree, so was silent.

When they reached the circle they found it somewhat difficult to pierce the crowd, and had it not been that Master Pennyfeather caught sight of them they would never have reached the inner ring, the only one fit for a Pennyfeather! Eve, with one glance at her mother's face, saw that Annys had not betrayed her, and a weight was taken off her wicked little mind. She forgot, however, to thank her kind elder sister. A country-dance was *en train*, and Annys saw with a little heartache that Jacob was dancing with Mary Peckham, the minister's daughter. She had always imagined to herself that Jacob would come and ask her to lead off with him—and then how well he danced! Annys was sure none could compare with him!

"It is a pity that maidens must wait to be asked!" murmured Eve, who could hardly keep still. She was overheard by her father, who, sympathizing with his daughter, said that if she were not ashamed of such an old partner he would himself foot it with her—and Eve, who cared more for the dance than for the partner, accepted eagerly. They made a comely pair, the strong stout English yeoman, and the slight nut-brown maid with her pretty blue dress and her bunch of forget-me-nots.

Annys was very glad to stand still by her mother and watch the dancers, especially as she soon saw Maurice and Ben looking extremely happy. The former indeed could hardly be recognized, so merry and lively he seemed to have become. When that dance was over he came up to his mother, whilst Master Pennyfeather was walking about with Eve. Not a little proud was he of his pretty daughter.

"Look, mother!" cried Maurice. "See what a prize I have received for running!" He held up a fool's-cap made of paper. "This was for coming in last at the race," and the youth laughed at his own failure.

"Those who gave it thee could not compete with thee at thy book," said the dame, rather hurt at Maurice for laughing at himself.

"They would not thank thee if thou didst require them to sit down to class, I wot. Ah! what have we here? Eve dragging a young gallant after her. By my troth! what a comely fellow."

"Mother!" cried Eve, edging her way with true Pennyfeather determination across the crowd. "Father said I should present our kinsman to thee, young Rowland Whyte. Is it not a second cousin that my father would have it you were?"

"Eve, this is no courteous introduction," said the dame, making, or trying to make, a low curtsey, but finding it impossible for want of room.

"We will imagine that my fair young coz has said all that was necessary," returned the young man with the grace and ease which marked those brought up near the courtly circle, "as indeed she has, when she has called me Rowland Whyte and your kinsman."

I will not say that the dame was unwilling to own the relationship—on the contrary, she felt herself two inches higher than at the beginning of the dance.

"May I make so bold as to pray my eldest cousin to dance with me?" Rowland continued, casting a glance of admiration on Annys, which was quite lost on her as she was watching Jacob approaching. Evidently he too had come to beg her to dance.

"Annys, didst thou not hear?" said the dame sharply. "Thy

kinsman is praying thee to dance." Poor Annys was obliged to accept just as Jacob had come up and was about to speak; but seeing her led off by such a fine youth, he turned away in spite of Eve's glances, which were hints that she wanted to continue the sport.

"Come, then, Eve, thou and I will pair off," said the good-natured Maurice, who could perceive his sister's wishes; and Eve was only too glad to leave her mother's side and to join the merriment.

It would take too long to recount the various sports which took place; there was a small fair on one side of the green, and thither each dancer would take his love or his partner and buy a fairing. What jokes were made, what laughter was heard, what light-heartedness was to be seen on every side! Alas! for the good old days when mirth was mirth indeed, and not a hot-house plant well cultivated till it had lost its original form. England has no time for so many holidays now, and a village green is only the home and pleasure-ground of a few geese or some young cricketers.

Towards evening I must, however, own that the fun began to get a little noisy, and the crowd was to be seen pouring into the village on both sides of the bridge—for the procession was to start from the inn, and this was a sight which none wished to lose. Eve was so anxious to secure a good place, that she persuaded her father to take her and Ben on before the others. After the procession had passed, the Pennyfeathers were to return home and have a sumptuous supper and their private bonfires—for the villagers became too noisy and boisterous in the evening for it to be either pleasant or becoming to mix with them. This procession which appeared very grand to the outward eye, was,

however, composed of doubtful characters, and their finery was of course very tawdry. As the village clock struck seven the expected assembly filed out from beneath the old archway of the inn. First came twelve young men dressed as archers, arrayed in bright green coats, and carrying bent bows and sheaves of arrows; next came twelve fishermen in bright corselets; then a few billmen who wore aprons of mail (made of paper); and then appeared, preceded by some morris-dancers, Robin Hood, Friar Tuck, and Maid Marian, with their retainers. The rear consisted of sword-bearers, henchmen, footmen, and giants. These last, composed as they were each of three men, elicited roars of laughter! As this goodly company passed, the bonfires were lighted and the bright flames darted up into the air, whilst a heavy cloud of smoke curled itself away on the light summer breeze. Among the more tenderly nurtured there were some whose noses did not appreciate the smell which rose from the pile of burning bones, but these dared not express their disapproval of the most favoured of all the ancient and loyal customs of the land, so they muffled up their faces or turned away. Eve was not one of these—she was straining her eyes to see Friar Tuck and Maid Marian. As they passed near the bridge where she and her father were stationed, she was able to get quite close to the maid, and she quickly recognized, in spite of walnut-juice and finery, their waiting woman Amelia Sopp. This latter was so proud of forming part of the show that she did not notice Eve, and passed on all unconscious of having been found out.

"Now methinks we have had enough of this sport," said Master Pennyfeather, who was beginning to think of his supper. "It is high time that we took home such worthless baggages as this Eve of mine. Come, Ben, thou wilt be wanted; so I will

have no tarrying behind." Ben would far rather have stayed in the village to see the procession return, which it did after going the round of the great houses of the neighbourhood; but he dared not disobey his father, and moreover he was to preside at the home fires. This bait was sufficient to make him follow his father and sister. He sought in vain to find Maurice; but as no trace of him could be seen he kept up his dignity by walking some way behind Eve. Master Pennyfeather had grown so lively that he now nodded to every one he met, and asked any he might know whether they would come to Sandy's Hollow that evening, where more dancing was going to take place. Eve, too, joined her invitations to her father's, so that it seemed doubtful whether the large hall would hold the assembly.

When these three at last reached the house they found the rest of the family had been there some time, having been able to get their waggon harnessed, Maurice giving a helping hand and counsel to the not quite sober hostler. Eve ran up to her bed-chamber to change her blue dress, which was now hardly to be recognized, so dusty and torn was it. Sitting by the narrow casement she found Annys alone and without a light in the gathering twilight.

"What, sister! did the bevy of dames crush thy spirits? Alone, too—and supper will be ready anon; then for some more dancing. Ah! Annys, is it not sad that one must learn and pore over books every day, and listen to that canting pastor, when one could be so happy if every day were a St. John's Eve?"

"I am aweary," sighed Annys, "and would not for the world that every day should be like this one; but Eve, I would fain chide thee for having left me alone on the green! I had promised to stay and could not move; it was most thoughtless!"

"What! wert thou dull, sweet sister? that is not thy wont; come, I will give thee a kiss and thou shalt forgive me! I will whisper something pleasant in thy ear. Know then that father has bidden Rowland Whyte to come to-night, and he—that is, the gallant—asked me in private whether he should lead off the dance with thee! So I said yes; then he asked whether thou couldst dance a galliard, and I was pleased to be able to say yes again. Oh it will be fine indeed!"

"Leave me, dear Eve," sighed Annys, "I would rest before supper."

"Art thou cross-grained, Annys, on St. John's Eve? I fear the saint will not favour thee if that is the case;" and the girl hurried away after having put on another kirtle, seemingly ready to begin again at the very beginning of the games. Annys, left alone, leaned her elbows on the window-seat and buried her head in her small hands. The whole day had been a disappointment to her, she felt more inclined to cry than to join once more in the festivities. To her the day seemed all too long, and the evening she fancied would be still more wearisome.

"Ah!" thought she, "if even Jacob does come in I shall seem to care only for this new gallant; but I should not be surprised if he were to keep away. His father will not be here, I know; he thinks it but riotous amusement. Ah! welladay! I do almost agree with him. I find not myself much happier for all these frolics—they do not feed my humour. I once heard Jacob's father call them 'fooleries,' and I think he is right—but father does not think so, he loves all these sports, and says when we lose old customs then we shall lose old virtues." She shook her head in despair, as she heard the servants hurrying about below stairs preparing for the supper, and in so doing her head came in con-

tact with the pot of orpine. She looked up and saw the plants were quite withered.

"Ah! wicked prophet," she murmured, "this morning thou didst prophesy to me a day of happiness, but it has been far otherwise. I have still my herbs to throw into the fire to-night. Perhaps they will tell me something more true. Yesternight I dreamt of Jacob, and I did not tell my dream for fear of breaking the spell. . . . But what a foolish maiden I am! If Jacob loved me, as I had fondly hoped, what would father say? Even Eve was horrified at the idea." At this moment the great horn sounded, and Annys knew that she must hurry down. She had no time to change her dress; but then she was as neat as when she had started, only the pale faded forget-me-nots still clung to her tresses, and in her hurry she forgot to take them out.

I will not describe the great supper which followed. Let the reader imagine for himself a large wainscotted room, in the centre of which stood a long oak table, now covered with a home-spun cloth, and groaning beneath the weight of good things. Forks had lately come into fashion, and there was nothing to shock our modern ideas, except, perhaps, that the appetites of our forefathers would seem to us rather prodigious. Towards the end of supper songs were sung, and Rowland Whyte delighted the company by singing, in a good clear voice, a song beginning with,

> "Hail and welcome, fairest queen!
> Joy had never perfect been
> To the fays that haunt this green,
> Had they not *this* evening seen."

As he finished he turned towards Annys, who was so unconscious of the compliment that Eve had to nudge her and whisper, "Annys,

seest thou not that he means thee? 'Tis only because thou art the eldest, for I heard to-day some one remark that I was the fairest of the two."

Whilst the table was being cleared, all the company went out into a field adjoining the house. There, three immense piles had been built, and Ben presided over the lighting, helped by Master Pennyfeather. It was now quite dusk, and this much added to the enjoyment of the younger members, till the darkness was illuminated by the bright flames. The wood-fire was the soonest burned out, and the young men amused themselves by running across the still burning ashes, and the maidens secretly threw in their herbs, to which they attributed magic powers. Annys had sought for Jacob's face in vain among the guests at the supper table, and therefore was less unwilling than she might otherwise have been, to hear the new kinsman talk about his experiences of London. She had even allowed him to escort her to the field, and was grateful to him for shielding her from the sticks and burning brands which were now and then thrown about by the young men. She, however, seized a moment when he was not looking to take her bunch of dried herbs and to throw them into the red ashes. They had just caught fire, when Ben, with a long pole, scattered the ashes all about, and with them the bunch of herbs disappeared and were trodden under foot. She was on the point of exclaiming, when, looking round, she saw that Jacob stood not a yard's distance from her.

"Is it not time to return to the house?" said he, as he caught her eye; "now that the fires are dying the night air feels chilly, and I hear the music beginning."

"Aye, and, fair cousin, I am promised the first dance," put in Rowland.

"Nay," remonstrated Annys, for the second time disappointed, "but I said nothing."

"But a pretty bird whispered it to me." Annys did not answer, but walked on in silence, and having reached the hall her mother at once whispered to her that Rowland Whyte was to head the country-dance with her. She was therefore obliged to submit, and when that was finished, and she looked round the room whilst Rowland was complimenting her dancing, she could nowhere perceive Jacob. The young girl no longer cared for the dance, and would have been truly surprised had she known that she was envied by all the maidens for having such a handsome kinsman, who had so conveniently turned up on St. John's Eve, and who, moreover, seemed quite prepared to dance *in* the saint's day itself.

"What a conquest thou hast made!" babbled Eve, as she was hastily preparing for bed. "Would that I were thy age, and I too should have young gallants dancing with me of their own accord. Knowest thou, Annys, that I was forced to entreat Ben to dance with me!"

"I would willingly have spared thee all my partners," said Annys, who had that day learned that expectations are but vain things. "If thou wert my age thou wouldest wish to be young again: well I am right glad the day is over."

"Ah! Annys, thou art not in earnest? I would get up now if we might begin again!" But in two more minutes the "nut-brown pate" of the maiden was wrapped in slumbers.

CHAP. III.—HOW MAURICE WENT TO OXFORD.

WHEN Annys woke the next morning she remembered that she had not found her bunch of forget-me-nots in her hair. She was sorry, for she had meant to put them in paper and preserve them as sad tokens of a sad day. She did not, however, dare to ask if anyone had picked them up, for Dame Pennyfeather could not have understood such a foolish fancy. *Her* mind was fully occupied in seeing that all the household goods were put away, and she had no mercy on the sleepy maids. Amelia was sharply reproved for yawning when her mistress was setting her to work. The good matron was further scandalized by seeing that she had suspended a pair of large brass ear-rings to her ears, and when asked where she could have got such vile trumpery, replied, that they were fairings.

"Fairings, indeed!" quoth the dame, "let me see no such fairings here, they are only fit to be given to one of the folks who join the procession." After which remark Amelia was not again seen with her ears adorned.

In a few hours the household was once more going on in its old routine, and, alas! all too soon for Ben and Eve, the pastor made his appearance, Latin book in hand. He was greeted by his pupils with a volley of questions, such as—

"Well, pastor, did you see Friar Tuck? they must have passed right under your window. If you were looking out at the stars, as is your wont, you must have seen the lovely mask that Friar Tuck had on. Come, you must own that you were peeping at the procession from behind your casement."

"If I had," answered the pastor, pulling out a "Cæsar" from his pocket, "it would surely have been to upbraid them."

"They would scarce have listened to you," responded Eve; "the maid was, however, gloriously dressed. She had on mock chekelaton, all glittering with gold, and an embroidered cameline kirtle. But the greatest jest was when one of the giants fell down. The mask came off, and the poor man, who was hoisted on the shoulders of his fellows, was overturned into the midst of the crowd, and for some minutes my father said the hapless swain was in jeopardy of being trampled under foot! Surely, pastor, you heard the cries; they were not far from Butcher Roche's shop. The jolly butcher himself was in the midst of the disturbance, I saw his rubicund face glistening like a holly berry."

"I was soaring in mind to higher things," answered the pastor; "I would not be seen among such gadding people. I seek but the haunts of sobriety. It is time, Ben, to cull the herbs of—"

"Yea, yea," was Ben's answer impatiently, for he knew that speech about culling "herbs of learning" by heart; to-day he would willingly have been gathering true herbs in the fields, instead of the dry mental and figurative ones which his tutor would fain have made him chew. Eve, however, was not sorry to begin her studies, knowing that the sooner begun, the sooner done, and to her they were no trouble. She secretly

pitied Ben, whose head had not been formed with a view to Latin or Greek, and who was hopelessly stupid over his books. It did not improve the boy's temper to see that his sister could beat him at their lessons; he, however, revenged himself by lording it over her in their play-hours; he knew full well that if she tried to follow his example she would tear her girl's attire to shreds, and would get a severe reprimand from her mother. If Eve feared anyone, that person was Dame Pennyfeather, who tried to bring up her children according to Bible rule, and had always before her mind's eye the text, "Spare the rod, and spoil the child." So she neither spared the rod, nor spoiled her children!

Rowland Whyte had come to Sandy's Hollow a few days after St. John's Eve, and had informed Master Pennyfeather that he was paying a visit to his uncle, who was a squire in the neighbourhood, but that he had lately been made secretary to the Earl of Sussex. He had only a few days more to spare, but, when the autumn should have come, the earl had promised him a long release from work, then he hoped that he might once more be able to pay his respects to his brave kinsfolk. Master Pennyfeather was most cordial, said that he was proud to own such a goodly young man, though for that matter he, Rowland Whyte, might be proud to belong to the race of Pennyfeathers. Was there not a Pennyfeather now in high power at some foreign court; was there not another in the navy, and one in the army; in fact, was not the world nearly peopled by Pennyfeathers and their relations? Rowland Whyte smiled unperceived, and added gravely that he knew well that Pennyfeathers abounded, for at this moment there was one under sentence of death for having been concerned in the late rising

under my Lords of Northumberland and Westmoreland, which the great Earl of Sussex had himself put down. The good yeoman did not like his words to be so interpreted, but finding nothing to say, contented himself by warmly repeating his invitation. Rowland also impressed the dame most favourably by sitting with her for half an hour, whilst he made his adieux, and telling her about the court fashions. Annys was in the room, and listened wonderingly at the stories of court wit, and of entertaining gossip. It opened such a new world to her, that the quiet country maiden listened to the recital with the same eagerness as when a child she had heard her old nurse repeat fairy tales and legends of the neighbourhood. She wondered whether those grand court ladies were ever unhappy about their lovers, as she was about Jacob, or whether they ever cried when they looked out of their casements on moonlight nights. Annys, however, dismissed these ideas. No, the witty, gay people Rowland talked about could never be sad. At that part of her meditations Rowland got up and took his leave, making such a grand bow that Annys blushed, for he also murmured a compliment in such low tones that Dame Pennyfeather could not catch the words. Poor Annys could not help wishing for the rest of the afternoon that Jacob had been to court and had learned to make such knightly bows!

With Rowland Whyte's departure the excitement of midsummer time seemed to be over, but there were quiet country pleasures and pastimes which could always please the simple-hearted Pennyfeathers, and which made their lives flow on happily, as well as peacefully. And very soon they began to prepare for Maurice's going to college. The mother's heart was a little sore, as well as her fingers, when she stitched away at the new set of shirts,

but she would not let her sorrow appear, for she had a little of the Roman matron in her character, and, moreover, felt a certain pride in sending out her first-born into the world, in order to show that censorious circle what a genius had been growing up beneath the eaves of Sandy's Hollow. Annys, too, felt the approaching separation deeply. In early youth she and Maurice had studied together, and played together, and Maurice had always been her knight and her champion. He had ever been ready to do battle for her, and no gentle knight could have been more attentive to his lady love than he had been to his quiet timid sister. Now it would all be changed. Maurice would be called on to fight harder battles, and he would have to make truth his lady love, and for her sake conquer many enemies. Eve and Ben in a lesser degree felt sorry that their elder brother was going out of their daily circle, for he had never been ill-natured, and had often helped them out of their misfortunes. But Master Pennyfeather was the one who most felt his son's departure, though he said the least. From henceforth he could not appeal to Maurice, as was his wont, for after his college life Maurice had elected to become a clergyman. Ben was to walk in the footsteps of his father, that is, if Ben could ever learn to walk in any footsteps, but those marked out by himself.

At length the day came which was to be the last one Maurice was to spend at home for some few months. The pastor had been invited to stay for supper, and pass the evening at Sandy's Hollow; he had assented with more willingness than usual, for his purse having been of late very empty, his table had followed suit; in plain words the pastor had not had a good dinner for a week, and this was the reason why his grace that day was so unusually long, that even Master Pennyfeather grew

a little impatient and said a more hearty Amen than was his custom. Annys allowed a few tears to trickle down her cheeks, but the others behaved as usual. Eve, indeed, refrained from making any pert speeches, and this for her was a great sign of grief. After supper the family went out and sat on the green lawn: a few benches had been brought for the elders, and Maurice, Eve, and Ben lay on the smooth grass. Presently Master Pennyfeather rose, and having retired to the house soon came out again bearing in his arms a large volume.

"Think you, Ben, that father is going to preach us a homily out of that big volume?" whispered Eve; "or is it for the pastor that he may the better digest his supper?"

"I care not, if it be a sermon I will go to sleep, and if thou tellest of me, Eve, I will not let thee into a secret that I have found out." Eve being very curious, nodded her acceptance of the bargain, just before Master Pennyfeather reseated himself and turned towards Maurice, saying,

"And now, my boy, tell us where thou art going to-morrow."

"Nay, father, we all know that," answered Eve, but was silenced by her mother, upon which Master Pennyfeather repeated his question.

"If all's well, father, I shall to-morrow start for Oxford."

"And what wilt thou do when thou hast reached the learned city?"

"With God's help I hope to study and become a learned man."

"Aye, aye," said the pastor, "but thou wilt find there a crowd of varlets who pretend to be scholars, and who are but pupils of the devil. I tell thee, Maurice, beware of such fools in caps and gowns."

"I vouch for Maurice that he will not mix with such as those," said Dame Pennyfeather, who had full confidence in her son.

"But even among the learned," persisted the pastor, "Maurice will find ravening wolves. Hebrew is taught by a Jew, and a Greek monk instructeth in his own language."

"Then thou wilt learn puzzling things," said his father, "they will teach thee Algrim and many uncanny things. Is it not so, pastor?"

"Yea, yea, they will teach him also the property of the circle, and the parts of the triangle, but this knowledge will not keep out the devil from the heart."

"Nay, I know that well, but Roger Bacon was not misguided by his learning, and I hope I may not be," said Maurice.

"Let us suppose thee well out of college, lad, and what then?"

"Then I will take holy orders and be a good Protestant, loyal to my church and my queen."

At this speech the pastor was going to burst forth in defence of the Puritans, when he was stopped by Master Pennyfeather.

"No offence to you, good Mr. Hapgood, I like right well to hear the boy speak out so boldly. Now, Maurice, I am pleased with thy answers, but prythee, lad, what sort of a parson wilt thou make? Nay, answer not in thine own words, but read this out, and if it should be a little rude in language, thou wilt interpret it to us who have no learning."

So saying, Master Pennyfeather held out the great volume to Maurice, who took it and read in a clear voice Chaucer's description of the poor parson:—

"A good manne there was of religioun,
And was a poore parsone of a toun,

But rich he was of holy thought and werke.
He was eke a learned man and a clerke,
That Christes gospels truly would preach;
His parishens devoutly would he teach."

When he had finished to the end there was a moment's silence, then Master Pennyfeather repeated again the last two lines in a slow, impressive manner—

"But Christes love and His apostles twelve
He taught, but first he followed it himselve."

"That is what I would fain thou shouldest remember, my lad; a Pennyfeather must needs set the example wherever he goes, and thou wilt not bely thy race."

"I will do my best, father, albeit I am not strong on my legs yet."

"Modesty becomes the young," quoth the pastor, "and I am right glad Maurice is not altogether bereft of it, nor yet entrapped by the deceitfulness of the world."

By this time Ben and Eve had got tired of the serious conversation and wandered away. This effectually stopped the pastor's moral remarks, for to say the truth they had chiefly been hurled at the heads of his heedless pupils. Annys having finished her work drew Maurice aside, so that they might once more visit all the old haunts of childhood lying near the house, and thus passed the time till it was the hour for family prayer and retiring to bed. Master Pennyfeather lay down with a clear conscience, for he had warned his son of the perils he was about to encounter, and had, moreover, told him what was expected of a Pennyfeather. The dame, I am sorry to say, kept awake half an hour, worrying that Maurice's twelfth shirt was not quite finished, but she remedied this evil by getting up an hour earlier

than was her wont. So in their several ways Maurice's family bade him God-speed.

The day after the departure of one of the family circle is always a day of dulness and general sadness. Though Maurice had been the silent one of the family, yet now he was gone it seemed the old mirth had departed with him. Eve was especially dull, and only consoled herself by being more troublesome than usual at her lessons. After these wearisome tasks were over, Eve drew Ben away into a wood at some distance from the house, and then said with much energy—

"Ben, thou must tell me what thy secret is. Dost thou know that thou went fast asleep whilst Maurice was reading about the poor parson, and I did not tell of thee, so thou art bound to tell me."

"Nay, because it would not be a secret if thou knewest it; I wot that Annys and mother would know it afore night."

"Nay, indeed, Ben, look then, what shall I do to convince thee that I can hold my tongue when occasion serves?"

Ben could not at that minute devise a trial to prove the chattering maid, and as he really wished her to know his secret, he only let her beg for a quarter of an hour longer before he said "Well, Eve, promise once more and I will tell thee, only I half fear—"

"I believe it is nothing, or thou wouldest have told me long ago," replied Eve, who, like a true woman, now went a round-about way to get at her object. "I care not to hear it."

"It truly will please thee, though. Know then that yester-night when I was walking out alone in the evening before supper, I wandered further than usual. I was about returning home, when I thought I heard sounds not far off. They seemed

to come from the old barn that has been left to rot, and where no one ever goes. So I crept up quietly behind it, and sure enough some one was talking within. Now, Eve, guess who was the speaker?"

"The pastor, I should say."

"Yes, there he was standing on an old tub in the middle of the barn, and around him were some thirty persons. Nearly all of them were women and children, but the pastor was not looking at them, he was looking straight up in the roof at an old rotten beam, and I half thought it would fall on his nose. He was talking very gravely, but I know not one word of what he said, that is, I know not one word of the homily, but when he had done speaking he said that if his hearers would come Thursday, that is to-morrow, night, at the hour of eleven, he would bring a famous preacher to talk to them. You see the pastor is afraid of being seen. He little guessed that I was peering at him through the beams. Anyhow, I mean to get up and go too, to hear this great preacher. Only think, Eve, what a frolic it would be to be out at that time."

"Then, Ben, I must come with thee. It would be an adventure so much to my taste. I promise no one shall know it."

It is some way; thou art a girl, and couldst never walk so far, besides Annys would hear thee quit thy bed."

"Nay, trust me, none shall know."

And Ben, after much persuasion, consented, though in his heart he was very glad to have Eve's company.

"There is yet another thing," continued the cautious Ben; "there will be a moon on our way there, but none when we come back, and there are ditches and such like to be climbed over. In the dark it will be no easy task."

"There, Ben, have no fear of leaving me forlorn in a ditch or on the top of a hurdle. Now let us see how best our plan will succeed. Annys sleeps so soundly that a house on fire and a troop of soldiers would not wake her; of her there is no fear, but it is about the back-door. We must pray Silent Joe to leave it open for us. It is his business to see it is shut."

"Pish! If thou want doors open for thee, thou hadst best stay in bed. I had thought of getting out through my casement on to the gable, and so down into the garden."

"Aye, but how climb up again?" Eve was not prepared to do this; indeed, the climbing up again in the dark would not have been easy for Ben, so he condescended to listen to a plan of bribing Silent Joe, who was a new servant man, lately come, and who had acquired the nickname of "Silent" by his unusual wisdom in keeping his tongue nearly always at rest except when he was eating.

"He never asks any questions," continued Eve, "and if Amelia finds out, and she always does find out everything, I know something that will stop her tongue."

"Well, I will leave all this underhand business to thee," said Ben, grandly. "Now we had best come home, or mother will inquire what we have been doing."

The rooms on the first floor at Sandy's Hollow were large and commodious, but the upstairs sleeping rooms were small and dark. A long, badly lighted passage ran the whole length of the house, and the bedroom doors all opened into it. Annys and Eve shared a room at the end of this passage; Ben had a small closet at the head of the stairs at the other end; Eve would, therefore, have the whole length of the passage to traverse to join her brother. But the reckless girl only thought that the

pleasure was heightened by the chance of discovery. She well knew that if she were found out the punishment would be severe; but Eve had a clever head, and determined to lay her plans on a safe foundation.

Silent Joe was busy building up a stack of straw the next morning, when he was surprised to see young Mistress Eve climbing up the ladder which was placed against the stack. When she had reached the top she sat down, and looking round to see that no one had observed her, said—

"Joe, I want you to leave the back-door open to-night. Ben and I wish just to have a little walk."

"Awaw," responded Joe, not pausing in his occupation.

"And say naught about it, Joe."

"Awaw," drawled out Joe again.

"No harm can happen; we shall not tarry so very long."

Joe made no answer this time, but scratched his pate and paused in his work. Evidently he did not quite take in what was wanted of him, and could not make out what Mistress Eve was aiming at.

At last a bright thought struck Eve. It was commonly reported that Silent Joe much admired Amelia. This latter had, however, taken no notice of her dumb suitor, for it was a subject of joke among her fellow-servants. Eve remembered this, and said in a very coaxing voice, which was meant to move Joe's heart,—

"If you will leave the door open to-night, Joe, I will tell Amelia what a good-hearted swain you are. You would like that, Joe?"

"Awaw," said Joe, grinning from ear to ear: he evidently took in this last piece of news, and he found it very pleasant and comforting.

Then thought Eve—surely he will do it; but she was not quite certain even now, and determined to make sure. How angry Ben would be if they found the door fastened! For the undoing of the bolts would certainly awake, if not Master Pennyfeather, at least the dame, who would not scruple to send her husband down, halbert or club in hand, to fall upon the robbers.

"Now, Joe, I will sing thy praises to Amelia this very evening if the door need not be shut."

"And the master," said Joe, now taking in the idea that his honour was being tampered with. "He will think ill of me."

"I will see to that; no blame shall fall on any but myself."

"Awaw," finally answered Joe, and Eve could get nothing more out of him, and so contented herself with this.

The afternoon seemed truly long and tedious, she could hardly sit still to her work. And this brought down a severe reprimand from the dame upon her. Annys was so dull that Eve did not seek out her company, or perhaps her sister's sober ways might have brought her back to her senses. In the afternoon the weather clouded over, and rain began to fall. Eve thought with regret that the land would be wet, and the heavy ground she would have to pass would leave traces on her petticoats. However, she hoped to secure Amelia's silence by telling her how she had discovered her under the character of Maid Marian. Poor Eve, she could so well plot and plan for her own thoughtless amusement, but she could not foresee the consequences of her conduct.

CHAP. IV.—JACOB'S WOOING.

DURING the family prayers Eve could think of nothing but how best to steal down the passage unheard by her mother. Now, what if her stern parent should take it into her head to sit up that night? Maurice's shirts were disposed of, so Eve hoped for the best, and these hopes were realized. She herself was always in bed before Annys came up, and very often she had fallen fast asleep, but there was no fear of that this evening. Eve, however, dreaded sleeping so much that she sat up pinching herself. As usual, Annys and Dame Pennyfeather came upstairs, and each turned in to their own chambers. Annys, however, being sad at heart (for Jacob had not come near Sandy's Hollow since Midsummer's Eve), sat down on her window-sill, and opening the casement, leaned out of the window. The moonbeams lighted up her fair head, and strayed lovingly over her neck and hands; but Eve cared nought for moonlight or for sentiment.

"Annys, thou wilt catch cold if thou stayest all night at the window. Prythee, come and undress, and shut the casement." Annys started—she had thought her sister asleep—and immediately drew in her head and shut the window. In truth, she was a little afraid of Eve's ridicule.

"Thou shouldest be asleep, little sister," she said gently.

"Nay; how could I sleep when thou art all the while moving about and making a noise?" Annys made haste without saying another word, and in an hour more the whole household but Eve was asleep. Eve guessed it must be near half-past ten, and knew she had very little time to spare. There was enough light to dress by, and this she did as quickly as she could. Yet she was obliged to use unwonted care for fear she should upset a chair, and throw down her brushes, or other such noises as she was accustomed to make. How silently she crept down the passage, holding her boots in her hands! how softly she tapped at Ben's door, and how eagerly she listened for his answer! It came at last, for Ben had by no means exercised his sister's self-denial in stinting himself of sleep; but on the contrary, he had slumbered soundly until her knock woke him up, and he jumped out of bed, put on his things, and let her in.

"Oh! Ben, I thought thou wert never coming; I thought too thou hadst gone without me! There, do not tread so heavily; mother will hear the stairs creak." Eve was leading the way, and once arrived at the bottom she breathed more freely. How glad too was she to find the back-door not bolted! After all, Joe was not so stupid as he looked. But their difficulties were not yet over. They found that they were shut in in the farm-yard, and unless they made a long round by the lawn and bowling-green they could not get out.

"We shall be late," sighed Eve in despair.

"I shall not make the round," said Ben: "I have often got over the roof of the pig-sties, and so out into the fields; and that is what I shall do now, whether thou wilt follow or not." Eve had, of course, no intention of being left behind, and prepared to follow. What would Dame Pennyfeather have said could she have seen her

younger daughter entering the pig-sty, splashing through the mire, and lastly, running boldly through the midst of the collection of animals, and rousing a dozen little two-weeks-old infant pigs, and with a helping hand from Ben, hoisting herself up on to the roof, and from thence leaping down into the field?

"Ben, this is the most exquisite adventure."

"Can'st thou walk no faster? there is some way yet," was all the answer she got. After this Eve spoke no more till they were approaching the spot. When within a few yards of the barn door the two children stopped and listened. They could see some lights burning through the holes and cracks of the old beams, and could distinctly hear a man's voice speaking with much energy.

"That is not the pastor's voice," whispered Eve, edging up to her brother.

"Could we not make our way in where it would be less chilly?" It had rained during the evening, and every blade of grass was dripping wet, and the earth damp and cold. The air too was saturated with moisture, and a slight fog was rising, making the landscape appear distorted and uncanny in the moonlight. Ben and Eve approached on tip-toe, though they need not have taken this trouble: no one was thinking of them, and no one heeded them. When they came close up to the barn-door they found that it was only closed. Eve, muffling up her head so as not to be recognized, gently pushed it open and entered, followed by Ben. They squeezed themselves into a corner, and then Eve found herself at liberty to take a survey of the place and of its occupants. The old tub mentioned by Ben had given place to a common wooden chair, raised on a kind of platform: the tub was placed on the ground so as to form another seat. Most of the people were seated on the ground, whilst a few of them stood leaning against the wooden beams. Standing on

the platform was a man who at once attracted Eve's attention. He was thin and spare; his face had an earnest expression, and his eyes kindled as he spoke. On the chair by his side was a broad-brimmed hat of black felt, "quite of a novel shape," thought Eve. He himself was dressed in black, and Eve at once recognized him to be a Puritan clergyman. Seated on the tub was the pastor, gazing earnestly at the preacher, and evidently drinking in every word that fell from his lips. At first, Eve was so much occupied in taking note of all those present that she did not hear what the Puritan was saying, but presently she was attracted by the eloquence and power of his speech. She now listened and caught these words:—

"Have we not suffered, my brothers, for our faith, have we not been exiled, have we not hidden ourselves in caves and dens, and asked for shelter at every poor cottage? Aye, we have done all this! I myself have crossed the sea and wandered through Germany, seeking shelter and finding none. I have been hungry and penniless, and why? Because I would not return to tread once more in the mire, because even a sovereign could not force me back to those iniquitous Popish practices. Aye, I fled, but there were some who stayed, and shall I tell you what was done to them? Nay! but that would make your blood curdle in your veins. Ask others and they will tell you; but this much you all know—how that those steadfast ones who would not give up their faith were thrown into dungeons, noisome holes, dark, loathsome corners. Some were kept there loaded with irons; some were tied to the stocks, and left there for hours, fastened with manacles and fetters; some whipped, some beaten with rods, some buffetted with fists. But enough of this: they suffered for the faith, and would not return to the religion which could order such cruelties. They are the blessed,

and we have to follow their example. When our gracious sovereign, whom God preserve, ascended the throne, the exiled heard from afar of her goodness, and came flocking back to the old land. Did they find Popish faith and Popish customs extinguished by the blood that had been shed? Alas! the name only had been effaced. The church has still her foes to fight against. Everywhere there can be found signs that Popery is not rooted out. The so-called rulers of the church have once more lifted up their voices, and are telling the clergy what they shall do within their church, and how they shall do it, instead of allowing each one to follow the path pointed out to him by his conscience. Very soon greater tyranny will follow, and the blood of those martyrs will have been shed in vain. Nay, but it shall not be in vain: if each true believer will stand firm, what cannot we accomplish?—anything and everything. Take your Bible and let that guide you, aided by your conscience."

There was quite a murmur of applause when the preacher got down from his platform. This he had to do very carefully, for none of it seemed very secure; indeed, as it was, he nearly fell into the arms of Mr. Hapgood. Then came a great shaking of hands, in the which the pastor joined, forgetting that he was not the man of consequence himself, so much had he identified himself with his friend. In the general bustle Ben and Eve were nearly suffocated by being flattened against the wall: this proceeding very much hurt Ben's inner feelings and Eve's outward sensations. On the whole, they had not found this secret meeting much fun, and the heat of the barn had made them very sleepy, and not at all inclined to turn out into the dark night and walk home. There was also some difficulty as to how they *should* get out of the barn at all without being discovered, for Mr. Hapgood, after having shaken hands all

round within the building, had now stationed himself at the doorway in order to repeat the process. Eve was fairly puzzled. How could she and Ben pass unnoticed? for if the pastor shook hands, he certainly would recognize them. (They had escaped the first round.)

"We must run quickly past him," she whispered at last to her brother: "only one at a time: now you must go first and wait for me round the corner of the barn." Ben was only too glad, and with a great deal of unnecessary noise he dashed past his tutor. Eve saw at once that this had been a bad plan, for Mr. Hapgood having stretched out his hand, expecting the next comer to seize it and give it a hearty shake, found that the hand remained stretched out, but not taken, and moreover, that some one had rushed by him, treading with much violence on his foot in so doing. He rubbed his eyes and began to say something about "a strange apparition," when Eve, thinking it best not to tarry longer, darted past the bewildered pastor. "It is a spy! a spy!" said he. Immediately the cry was taken up, and about half a dozen people who still remained in the barn ran out in order to give chase. Poor Eve! she heard the cry, and fear gave her strength. She never paused to find Ben, but flew on straight before her into the night. She heard the shouts of her pursuers, but the darkness which hindered her also impeded their progress. She was, however, crossing a field, and the wet mould clung to her shoes, and she could not run. She was not aware, moreover, that she was flying away in the wrong direction: her mind was solely occupied with the thought of her mother. What would Dame Pennyfeather say if Eve were taken by one of the common people as a spy? (In those days it was no joke to be even thought a spy.) Then her father—what would he say to her having attended this meeting?

Eve repented heartily as she struggled through that heavy field. She heard steps: some runner was coming quite close to her. Oh! she must elude him; she must run on till she came to a hedge, where she could crouch down. Alas! at that moment Eve fell over a big stone, and was so much shaken that for a few seconds she could not raise herself up. Before she had collected her ideas a hand had seized her, and some one was helping her to rise.

"By my troth! whom have we here? A maiden!" A thrill of pleasure ran through poor Eve's chilled veins. She said hurriedly, "Oh, Jacob Buckston! it is you: Prythee, good Jacob, I beseech you to take me out of the path of those vile people: I will do anything for thee if thou wilt." Jacob laughed heartily, which wounded poor Eve's vanity. He, however, had helped her on her feet again, and was now trying to reassure the frightened girl.

"This is no fit night for you to be walking about, and alone too! but it was indeed a fine sight to see how you frightened the pastor!" and Jacob laughed again at the recollection. Eve was silent and pouted.

"To speak seriously, Mistress Eve, may I ask your intentions, for this is not the way home? Does Dame Pennyfeather know of this midnight walk? I should scarce think she would approve of her daughter turning Puritan."

"Neither would Annys care to hear you were there," said Eve, not subdued.

"That is another matter. I went with my father, who is too old to guide himself in the dark." Jacob forgot that he was talking to a young girl; he remembered only that she was Annys' sister, and therefore wished to justify himself. He had given her his arm, and they were now retracing their steps. After a little silence Jacob remarked,

"It passeth my understanding how such a frolic entered your head. But it was fortunate I was there. Yet I did not see you during the meeting."

"If you come with your father I may come with my brother," and Eve tossed her head. The truth was that she was beginning to be very much ashamed of herself; she had tasted her apple, and found it sour.

"What! Ben is here too! Why did he leave you in this plight?"

"Ply me not with so many questions, only let us walk faster, and, good Jacob, will you promise me not to breathe a word about having seen me to my mother? As to those poor cravens who will not say their say in the broad daylight, make up some cock-and-bull story for them." There was a silence; then Jacob said gravely,

"A man must ever speak the truth, Mistress Eve; if not, he is debased in his own eyes—when that happens things are come to a sorry pass."

"But you need say nothing, and no one will ask."

"But in after years, should it ooze out, Dame Pennyfeather would think of me as a dishonourable fellow, and I could not look her in the face. Nay, nay, Mistress Eve, had not you best make a clean breast of it and confess your fault?"

"I could not, I could not," said poor Eve, now quite humble. "You do not know my mother, she is so stern, and has such strict ideas of a girl's conduct. Annys would never have done such a thing; and indeed I meant no harm."

"Aye, truly;" and by this Jacob meant that he knew well that Annys would never have dreamt of escaping at night for a frolic. Presently Eve, who was almost crying, said humbly,

"Then, Jacob, I know what must be done to ease your con-

science. If you will come to-morrow into the bowling-green I will tell Annys to go there, and you shall tell her yourself. Annys may do as seems to her good about telling our mother." Eve knew well that she could easily work on Annys' feelings, and thus hoped to get out of the scrape altogether. Her spirits rose with this idea, and it was in her usual tone she said,

"Jacob, was it all true what that man was saying? If so, I do not wonder much at there being discontent in these days. Though what he finds of Popish practices in our village church I am at a loss to guess."

"There are many things not to his mind. Some of them would even do away with the sign of the cross in baptism, and of the ring in marriage. All form and ceremony is odious to them."

"Why, Jacob, I thought that you yourself were a Puritan." Jacob laughed.

"There is no pledge which binds the Puritans, Mistress Eve. They say that conscience should guide us; if so be that that forms a Puritan, then I am one; but if you mean that I would wish to abolish both state and church, then God forefend that I should be called a Puritan; but come now, here we are approaching Sandy's Hollow, and in this chill autumn air it is not good to tarry about."

"Ben and I cut our way short by climbing over the pig-sties and so out from the farmyard. Maybe you would give me a helping hand up again, then I should not trouble you further." But Jacob quite declined this feat, and conducted the maiden round by the lawn, and from thence led her to the back door! How dark and silent was everything; a sudden fear took hold of the usually courageous Eve. Jacob gave her his hand at parting, and she shook it warmly. "Thank you, Jacob, you have been very kind. But what of your father? and what shall you say to him?"

"He will have gone home with some neighbour, and I promise he shall know naught about the runaway lady."

"If you should meet Ben, you will tell him of my safety."

"Ben shall find out what he likes," returned Jacob; "he will not die if he is a little frightened, and it will teach him to mend his ways." So saying, he went off with quick steps, and Eve, feeling very much like a thief, stole upstairs, and so into her own chamber. All she had on was so bespotted with mud that she was obliged to conceal everything beneath a large shawl, and soon after the weary girl fell asleep, little thinking that Ben had been in half an hour before. Not having seen his sister, and, moreover, hearing the outcry, he had made the best of his way home, and was already wrapped in the arms of Morpheus.

Eve's punishment (for concealment is a real trial to the naturally open nature) was not over. The next morning, when Amelia came into the chamber, she was full of amazement at the most extraordinary circumstances which had taken place during the night.

"Ah! Mistress Annys, I will never believe but that the house is haunted. I woke up in the dead of the night, and such a tramping on the stairs that my blood became frozen in my veins. I sat up and listened, and then I heard the tread of a multitude of feet in the garden, and then I buried my head in the coverlet and nearly fainted!"

"It is well thou art alive to tell the tale," said Annys, smiling.

"Nay, but this is not all; this morning, Anne has found footmarks on the stairs, and enough real earth that would serve for a man's grave."

"Or a ghost's, thou timorous Amelia."

"You may laugh, Mistress Annys, but I say it is no laughing

matter; I would rather lie in my grave than pass such another night."

"Or perhaps thou wouldest rather go out merry-making, and figure as Maid Marian," put in Eve crossly; "come, enough of thy tales."

Amelia blushed scarlet, but said not another word about the mud. She at once divined that Eve had found her out, and moreover, that for some reason nothing was to be said about the night's disturbances, if she wanted not herself to get into disgrace. Eve congratulated herself on having escaped the only mode of discovery that had entered her head; but neither she nor Ben were prepared for Master Pennyfeather's sour looks at breakfast. The cause of these looks had occurred before that meal, when the yeoman was making his morning's survey of the farm. The autumn was already far advanced—many of the trees were bare, and there was nothing which could tempt Master Pennyfeather to linger long over his inspection of his live-stock. But as he passed the pig-sty which contained his best sow, behold the sty door was open and the little pigs were nowhere to be seen! Silent Joe had not yet come round with their morning meal, so the yeoman concluded that he had carelessly left it unfastened the previous evening. I am sorry to say he became very wroth within himself, and seeing a lad lingering about sent him at once to find the delinquent. Silent Joe was again at work at his stack, and being summoned, appeared, pitchfork in hand, before his master, who was standing in the sty. His face did not, however, express any surprise at seeing his master's state of mind.

"Sirrah! what mean you by your carelessness? Look what damage has been done. The pigs gone, and who knows where or when they will be found."

"Awaw!" replied the silent one unmoved.

"A plague on you, man. Have you no explanation to give me?"

Silent Joe put his thumb under his chin, and took hold of it, seemingly trying to remember what he had or had not done the evening before; but evidently his memory could not recall such a long past period, so he only shook his head slowly. Master Pennyfeather, seeing he could get nothing further out of him, calmed down, thinking him more fool than knave; so saying he had best hasten himself and seek for the wanderers, he took himself back to the house with the sour looks before mentioned.

Whilst Ben and Eve were lingering about before the arrival of the pastor, they heard their father lament Joe's carelessness to the dame, and assure this latter that he had taken the man to be a trusty fool, but now he found that he had no head as well as no wits, and that he had a great mind to part with him. Poor Eve bitterly reproached herself, for she had no unkind feelings towards Joe, and would willingly have spoken out and told her father everything; but the dame's presence restrained her then, and every minute made free confession more difficult and impossible. Ben took the whole affair most easily, and had found time to whisper to his sister that she had acted very foolishly on the previous night. Eve did not deny the statement; still it never improves the temper to be told something which one knows to be true, about personal shortcomings. Eve found out that it is very unpleasant to be cross with one's self; she began to understand what Jacob meant by being debased in one's own eyes. Before going to join Ben and the pastor, Eve went in search of Annys. She was helping her mother to mend some precious household linen, and hardly looked up when Eve said—

"Prythee, Annys, wilt thou go to the bowling-green at eleven o'clock? I was told to tell thee."

Annys answered "Yes," thinking the message came from her father, who often wanted her to come to him to take back directions to Dame Pennyfeather. Eve waited not to be questioned, but hastily joined the pastor, who could not imagine why his pupil was so wonderfully subdued. Once or twice a mischievous feeling came over her. She would dearly have loved to have inquired about the meeting and the supposed spy, but she restrained her tongue, knowing that the pastor would at once inform against her.

"Annys, it is eleven of the clock," quoth Dame Pennyfeather at last. "Go, seek thy father, and after that thou mayest read thy French; I shall want thee no more;" and thus the mother dismissed her daughter from her thoughts, little dreaming who it was she had sent her to meet. Annys put away her work, and slipping on her pattens, for the ground would be wet on the bowling-green, thought she, the maiden tripped out. She walked down the path of the old garden at the end of which stood the sun-dial, crossed the lawn, and turned in past the yew hedge on to the bowling-green. This was a long smooth bit of lawn, on both sides of which rose the tall yew hedge. A small path ran beneath the hedge, and at one end was a tiny arbour. Annys looked up and down, but could see no one. The sun was shining and making the many rain and dew drops to flash back blue, yellow, and red. The birds were having a morning concert, the invitations to which performance were given out gratis. Some smaller ones were darting, or rather springing along the grass and the path, in their own peculiar fashion, looking for worms. Annys had an eye for beauty, and sauntering towards the arbour began plucking some late monthly roses, thinking she would wait a few minutes to see

if her father made his appearance. After a few moments she heard a step, but as she was struggling with a rosebud she did not look up till the footsteps paused; then she exclaimed—

"There, father, I have hurt my fingers picking this, but I *would* have it."

"You should have waited till I came, Mistress Annys;" and the girl started, and turning round beheld Jacob Buckston.

"I had been told it was my father I should meet; that is," added Annys, always most truthful, "I understood I was to see him here."

Jacob saw her troubled face, and said at once—

"Then the scapegrace did not tell you; indeed I might have guessed as much, as she bid me come here for the purpose of telling you."

"Who then? Not Eve? What has she been doing?"

"Be not astounded, fair Mistress Annys, it has ended happily, though I must own I was much alarmed at first; for had any but myself found her I know not what they might have thought." He then related what had happened, finishing with his promise to tell only Annys, and to let her follow her own counsels for the rest.

"Only be lenient," pleaded Jacob, who loved Eve for Annys sake, and would not that through him the maiden should be well chid, as she indeed deserved to be.

"Do you then think me so hard-hearted?" replied Annys, with a little tremble of the red lips.

"Not a whit; I think that ofttimes you lean on the other side."

Annys answered nothing; she felt herself in a dream, and yet it was almost like a night-mare. There was something which prevented her from speaking. She would fain have answered from

the depth of her heart, but no reply would come. When she did speak, the words were not what she intended.

"Then you too were attending the secret meeting. My father laughs about them in public, but in private he laments over them, and says they will lead to harm. He says, moreover, that we owe obedience to the sovereign, and that these meetings are dishonourable, and unworthy of true men." Jacob looked hurt, but said calmly—

"There may be two sides to every question. Will you not grant that, Mistress Annys? Last night it was the great and good man Mr. Fox who himself addressed the meeting. You were too young to understand the miseries endured by the poor Protestants in the last reign; but the sore is still fresh in the minds of many men. They do not forget what they suffered, and now they would fain prevent the possibility of a recurrence of those persecutions."

"Yes, you may be right; but I mind having heard father say that many of those 'martyrs' provoked the authorities. Nay, that they even courted death."

"Men's minds are seldom evenly balanced, Mistress Annys; besides, in this reign there has been much provocation; Sampson and the worthy Humphrey were dismissed from the colleges at Oxford, and that violence has done much harm to the cause of the church. But I came not here to dissert upon the affairs of the Puritans. I am only a half-hearted champion. I wish you had heard Mr. Fox. Even your sister was struck with his earnestness."

"What would my father say?" answered Annys, laughing; "know you not that he can be very bitter against the disobedience of that party, as he calls it?"

"I know it too well, and that is why—" he paused, and the colour mounted to the soft cheeks of the maiden. She knew by

instinct what Jacob wished to say, but she did not mind biding his time to hear it. She did not help him by word or look. "That is why," repeated Jacob, "I have not spoken what has so often been on my lips, what methinks you must have seen ere this in my eyes; but the thought of your father—Ah! Mistress Annys, you may have thought me to blame; you may even have doubted of my love, if such a doubt could enter your mind; even now I dare not tell you what is in my heart. I hear you say beforehand that it is impossible, that I may not love you."

"I could not say that," said Annys, in a very low voice.

Jacob seemed hardly to hear her remark as he continued: "I have no right to tell you this, but for this meeting which neither of us sought. I would not have done so, but by my troth I could not keep it in. Yet you shall not say that Jacob could do an ungentle thing; if so, I should not be worthy of you. I will straightways to your father and tell him—implore him to think twice before he reject my suit. I have so long dreaded what would be his answer that I put off till this moment. Then came the thought that perhaps I was not loved. I cannot court you like the gallants who have fair speeches at their fingers' ends, but I know that I could love you far better. Annys! will you not believe this?"

Annys did not wish to doubt, and felt far too happy to think about what her father would say. Unlike Jacob she was content with the present happiness, as she held out her hand and they walked on together down the little path, where there was only just room enough for the two side by side. Moments of perfect happiness are so rare, they so seldom can be repeated, that on looking back we often wonder why we did not make a better use, or what *we* think a better use of them when they were ours. We would have said so much more had we guessed what circumstances

would follow, and then we upbraid ourselves bitterly for having wasted those golden, but, alas! winged moments which can never be recalled.

"Mistress Annys has of late lost her zeal for the French language," murmured the pastor, as Ben's stupidity put him in mind of his more docile pupil. "It is a bad sign when the spirit wearies of useful study, and refuses to imbibe the wholesome draught of learning."

"My mind would rather occupy itself with other things besides those vile books," said Ben. "If I were as old as Annys I would never open another; that will be my desire when I am a man."

"Except the Bible, Benjamin," replied the pastor, sternly.

"Nay, I would go to church and hear what is appointed for me to hear."

"There is Annys walking up the lawn," cried Eve, who had been looking out for her sister for the last half hour; "may I not run and warn her that you are at leisure? There too is Jacob Buckston with her. Look, Ben!"

"A godly young man," quoth the pastor, "and one from whom she may learn much good."

"He is not a Puritan at heart, though," responded the heedless Eve; he told me so himself, and I rejoice to hear it."

"What say you?" cried the pastor with unusual warmth; "my ears deceive me, or it is an invention of your tongue."

"Yes, yes, I dare say;" and Eve, surprised at her quiet tutor, was glad to escape in order to carry her message to Annys.

"Annys, dear Annys, have you heard?" whispered Eve, without taking notice of Jacob; "and you will not tell of me. It was but a piece of sport, truly it shall not happen again."

Annys was too happy to be able to chide much: she, however,

said laughingly, "Jacob will think but ill of me for having let thee escape from so near to me, and ill of thee for getting into such mischief."

"But you will not think very ill of me," pleaded Eve. Since last night Jacob had grown in her estimation: she really respected him, and this was indeed wonderful on her part.

"I could not think ill of one who had been the cause of my happiness. What sayest thou, Annys?"

Eve now took in the state of affairs, and a curious expression overspread her countenance. "But my father! Oh Annys! he will ask what took thee to the bowling-green, and then it will all out."

The prospect was gloomy, indeed, to Eve, who had thought herself out of the wood. She now remembered her message, and said that Annys had better come, or their mother might find out she had been out.

"Does Mistress Eve remember what I said about truth?" asked Jacob sternly. "Nothing can be obtained by crooked means; I would say, nothing that is worth having. I have naught to hide!"

Eve hung her head: she took Jacob's few words to heart more than all the pastor's sermons, and so she returned silently to her studies. Presently Annys followed, and sat down to read a book of French history, written by a certain Froissart, of whom Annys knew nothing but that she liked his lively style, and was generally much interested in her book. To-day, however, she had to use great self-command to force herself from calling her historical personages Jacob, or saying in the middle of a paragraph, "I am so happy!" It was well that she could be happy for a few hours at least, for she was young, and her hopes were tinged with golden love; such a thing as disappointment her mind could not at present take in.

CHAP. V.—MASTER PENNYFEATHER'S PIGS.

DURING this time Jacob had been seeking for Master Pennyfeather, and at last lighted on him in a wood at some distance from the house, whither the good yeoman had gone to see about some tree-cutting. Jacob, however, had come at a bad moment. A tree was being felled, and in a few minutes it would come crashing down.

"Stand off, Jacob Buckston! Holla, there! keep a look-out! ease it, ease it! Plague take thee, fellow! thy rope is in the wrong groove. Now, out of the way; holla!" The last mighty strokes were struck, and with a crash, a cracking of branches, a sudden flight of birds, a rustle, and lastly a shout from the men standing by, the tree fell. Master Pennyfeather shook himself well over, drew out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead, and then with the air of a man who has done a good morning's work, though in truth he had not struck one stroke, he turned round towards Jacob, saying, as he held out his hand—

"I must crave pardon for my rude behaviour, but in truth it was a ticklish moment: if I had not been here they would have spoilt that timber for me; I lay a wager on that. Has thy father marked his trees yet? My children are already thinking about Christmas-tide, and the Yule log must be well seasoned before

Christmas. Ah, Jacob! thou'lt find it out soon enough, I trow. We must have an eye ourselves to everything, and not leave it to silly hare-brained fellows, who scarce know their right hand from their left. I might as well dig my grave as let them have their own way. Just fancy to thyself my vexation this morning at finding half my pigs wandering about the country. It was that blockhead of a Joe. If it were not that I am short of hands, he should go to-morrow. But I was forgetting: thou couldst not have come to see my tree fall: what was then thy purpose—a message from thy father? If it be about that mill-stream, I tell thee plainly, Jacob, I will hear none of it."

Poor Jacob, usually so bold and fearless, knew not what to answer, and began to walk off from the neighbourhood of the men, who indeed would have overheard had he begun to speak.

"My communication was of a somewhat private nature," he said at last, whilst the yeoman was still wiping and panting for breath: "it related to a meeting I had this morning with your daughter, Mistress Annys."

"A meeting! how came that about? by appointment?"

"Yes; but it was not for any purpose of our own. Still, when I saw her again I could not hold my tongue, and I told her that I loved her. I have now come to tell you, Master Pennyfeather, and pray you to consider my suit. It is no hasty love, no young man's fancy, for I have loved her as long as I have had a heart to love; I loved her the first day I saw her, when we were both young, she, indeed, but a child, with quiet ways, and naught of subtlety about her. Methinks such love should not be altogether considered hastily, though I know you care not much for our family, and there is no good feeling betwixt you."

The yeoman had now found his breath, but was nearly losing it

again from surprise and anger. Jacob had expected as much, and stood by calm and silent, though not for a minute losing his temper.

"Sirrah! how dare you come and make love to my daughter? I wonder she is not ashamed to let you speak smooth words to her; a meeting forsooth! and who let you meet my daughter? Do you think I should let a Pennyfeather marry a Buckston?—a Puritan, a man with no pedigree! It's a marvel to me how you could be so presumptuous."

Jacob waited till he paused, then said, "You care not for your daughter's heart, Master Pennyfeather? I cannot expect you to think of me; but she—I fancy she is not wholly indifferent. Nay, I know she loves me."

"Then she may learn to unlove thee: not with my consent shall Annys be your wife."

"She shall not be my wife without your consent," answered Jacob, who knew too well what misery an unblessed marriage would bring, and would not for the world that Annys should repent of being his wife. So saying, he turned aside and was soon lost in the wood. Master Pennyfeather took a long time to recover his temper; indeed, he was so much afraid of meeting Annys that he sent a message to his wife that he would not appear at the mid-day meal, but would like some mess to be sent out to him. This was accordingly done by the hands of Silent Joe.

"Aye! aye! Joe, and have you found those pigs? Scoundrel that you are, you should not stay an hour longer if I were not in extra press of work."

Joe looked foolishly sulky, and murmured one of his usual exclamations, but got away as soon as he had deposited his master's food on the trunk of a tree.

"ye. SILENT JOE GETTETH INTO HOT WATER."

Master Pennyfeather would rather he had stayed, so that he might have had some one to vent his wrath upon. When one is in a bad temper the day wears but slowly away, and when one is unhappy the day seems to lengthen out into two, so for both these reasons I cannot say which of the two aggrieved persons—Annys or her father—were the most glad when the darkness obliged Master Pennyfeather to come in and set himself down by the hall-fire. Happily for him there was no one there when he first entered, so he was able to give sundry kicks to the great oak table, and to upset a chair or two before he finally settled himself down and began to meditate.

"Was there ever such an unhappy man as myself?" thought he; "I must e'en have a neighbour who behaves like a Turk about a paltry stream which runs twixt my land and his, and then, forsooth, his son must needs fall in love with my daughter. A low-born Puritan to cast his eyes on the eldest daughter of a Pennyfeather. I'll see him dangle from the gallows before that happens, as indeed may be the case. If the queen be as determined as folks say she is, why, she'll soon have these Puritans up and teach by sharp means if they will not learn by gentle ones. Aye, aye!"

"Father!" said a soft voice close to him. "Father, wilt thou wish me joy? Is he not the handsomest, the best, the bravest man in the county? Have I not been longing for thee, and thought the day would never end?"

Master Pennyfeather was silent. It was now his turn to be dumb. At last he said in an uncertain, half playful tone, "Come, come, Annys, thou couldst not have taken it in earnest. Pshaw! I thought thou wert more sensible. Consider, Annys, the fellow is a Puritan, and has been in danger, or at all events will be

in danger of being taken up as a disobedient, unruly mischief-maker."

"I know not what his principles or his opinions may be," answered Annys, standing up straight and proud before her father, like a true Pennyfeather that she was; "but I know, father, that Jacob is a right honourable man, and as good a Christian as any in the land. As to being a mischief-maker, I have never heard him breathe an ill-natured word of any living soul."

"Aye, aye! that may be; I say not but that he may have his merits; but then his father is a cross-grained, beggarly churl. He wishes to pick a quarrel with me about that stream, and by my troth he shall find me a tough subject for his blows!"

"But it is not the father who loves me," pleaded Annys.

"Enough of this, wench; I tell thee no Buckston shall ever have aught that is mine, unless he give up his puritanical whims."

"Jacob would scarce displease his father by openly breaking with him. He would not be a bad son for my sake, and I am right glad of it." Annys' blue eyes never sparkled like the hazel orbs of pretty Eve, but they had an open truthful look which inspired respect as well as love. Master Pennyfeather looked upon Annys as perfect because she bore his name, but he could not understand her being so far blinded by love as to wish to become a Puritan's wife. Far better not marry than to give up the church and the good old ways.

"Here will supper soon be prepared, so let us hear no more about it, Annys. Dost thou mind me?"

"I cannot bid my heart obey thee, father, and if I meet Jacob I shall tell him so; but in all else I hope thou wilt find me an obedient daughter." Some of the household now entering, poor Annys retired to her chamber.

It was quite dark, and the chill autumn wind whistled beneath the eaves and round the corners of the house. The sad moaning found an answer in the girl's heart and mingled its sighs with hers. The morning had been so bright, so full of sunlight, and now the evening brought nothing but sad thoughts, and a great void which nothing could fill. Of course Annys said to herself that evening that nothing ever would or should fill that place in her affections which she had given to Jacob. Those words "never again" belong to youth, belong to that time when clouds and sunshine quickly succeed each other; but whilst the clouds are lying low there seems no hope of the sun reappearing, and when sunshine reigns, the far off clouds are viewed as specks which cannot increase or burst upon the life which revels in the sunlight.

Perhaps Jacob would give up his opinions, mused Annys; but even as she mused she remembered his strict ideas about truth. He would never stoop to a mean action, never profess with his lips what his heart could not endorse, and on the whole Annys was not sorry that her lover should be of such a firm, upright character. Alas! lovers as well as unromantic folks must follow the daily routine of life, and as the horn sounded, Annys dried her tears and went down to take her accustomed place.

In the midst of the meal a horse's hoofs were heard in the yard. At so late an hour this was a most unusual thing. Master Pennyfeather, who noticed the curious looks on the faces of his household, said he should himself go and see what traveller had stopped to ask for hospitality, which thing he accordingly did. He was not long absent, and as he re-entered he held up a large square paper, saying joyfully:

"There, Dame Pennyfeather, what say you to this? A letter from your eldest born, come all the way from Oxford. We have

indeed much to be thankful for, now that the quietness of the land allows us to hear of the safety and welfare of those we love. What say you, shall I open it at once?"

"It would be more advisable to finish supper," answered the dame, who had little curiosity in her composition, and could restrain that little admirably. Eve had many troubles on her mind, Annys, as we know, was sad, and Ben cared not much for any news which came out of book or paper, so no one remonstrated against the delay. After supper, however, another log was thrown on to the fire, and the whole family being seated the father read Maurice's letter.

MY MOST LOVED AND HONOURED PARENTS,—

I would willingly have sent you before this some token of my poor penmanship to prove to you how well I was in mind and body. I like right well the college life, were it not that now and then some mischievous fellows oppress me and would fain that I should join in some of their mad frolics. But when I resisted them they wished me ill, and I had some persecution to bear. All is now however passed over, and we are good friends when we meet, which is not often, for I keep within my rooms or the lecture-rooms, knowing well the preciousness of time. The finest thing I have seen was the entry into this loyal city of our great Queen herself. It was a fair sight indeed, but it behoves me not to describe what Rowland Whyte could best tell you of. I met him in the streets, for he was in the suite of my Lord of Essex. Rowland Whyte said that he would be in our neighbourhood afore myself, upon which I wished him joy. My heart longs after you all. I would fain know how fare the twins and our wild Eve. Tell Annys I read daily some portion from out the Bible she gave me. I wish I could show you the fair colleges which adorn this city. The river, too, affords much enjoyment to those who come to Oxford for amusement and not for improvement. Tell Ben I depute him to choose the Yule log, and let it be of a famous

size. If you dance in the hall we will not except one of the old customs. Ask Annys to let me know when we are to dance at her wedding.

Your dutiful son,

MAURICE PENNYFEATHER.

"A wonderful letter!" exclaimed Master Pennyfeather, looking at the outside as well as the inside of the large sheet which Maurice had not managed to fill. "Maurice is a wonderfully clever fellow. Ah! Ben, I fear we shall never receive such a large epistle from thee; does this not make thee wish to go to college?"

"Nay, nay, one genius is enough for the family. I would far rather shoot with the bow like Jacob Buckston, and ride like Rowland Whyte, and become an honest man, than grow musty over books. I would not be like the pastor for the world."

This mention of Jacob brought a cloud on two of the faces of the circle, and the letter was folded up and put away along with the deeds belonging to the Pennyfeathers. Eve soon slipped out unnoticed; she wished to find Amelia, which she happily succeeded in doing. Eve was certain that neither Jacob nor Annys had told of her; there was only one person she now feared, and this was Silent Joe, who, if he were to be much blamed, might find his tongue. If he told his master that his children had taken a midnight walk, Eve knew not what consequences might follow.

"Prythee, good Amelia, I would thou couldest stitch up my kirtle, which Ben has even just now trodden on. I would thank thee heartily. Come then to my chamber with thy needle and thread." Amelia complied, and presently Eve said—

"Dost thou not think Silent Joe a very comely fellow, Amelia?"

"I do not deny that he is well-grown, Mistress Eve, and that his appetite is something astonishing."

"Nay, but he is also a well-favoured sort of a fellow."

"It would not be my place to deny it," was the guarded answer, for at present the maid could not see what the young girl was driving at. At something, she was sure.

"He certainly does not talk much, but perhaps, as the pastor would say, he ruminates all the more."

"There is no denying that, certainly."

"I fear," continued Eve, coming to the point, "that he may think my father was somewhat vexed about those brainless pigs, but thou hadst best tell him, good Amelia, that it is nothing, and that my father will soon forget it. Above all, tell him not to mention it! He thinks a mighty deal of thee, I fancy."

"I can hardly believe that, Mistress Eve; but of course if one good turn is done me, I must say that it deserves another." Amelia spoke the words pointedly, and Eve, who understood well enough, was forced thus to make a mean bargain with her maid-servant. She seemed to be led deeper and deeper into difficulties. How she wished she had not gone out, and then she wished still more that she had owned her fault. Every day made it more difficult to confess, and Eve found she had not courage to face her parents' anger. She answered therefore, half crossly, though she had but herself to blame—

"Of course, Amelia, that is but just; now my dress is mended, and it will soon be time to assemble in the hall. Remember, I trust thee to deliver the message to Joe." So saying, Eve ran downstairs, and Amelia shook her head up and down and smiled in a contented manner, murmuring—

"That is well; I now can be sure that that silly girl will not disclose her knowledge. She has entrapped herself."

Amelia also descended well satisfied with her interview; whether

she told Joe, or how she managed to explain to him the matter need not be told. One thing is certain, that Joe still kept to his silence, and apparently his wits did not sharpen as winter came on, and Christmas with all its gaiety was at hand.

Surely in those olden days old Father Christmas was more of a smiling old man than he now appears to us! I fear we have offended him by taking too little notice of him. He has now folded his arms, and as he shakes his head reproachfully, he says, "Yes, yes; it's all very well for you: you say you are too busy now to attend to me. I am a jolly old fellow doubtless, but really, I am rather too much of a good thing. They did not say so in the year 1570—oh no! Do you know what they did when I was walking slowly towards them? Oh no! of course you don't, because you have never taken the trouble to inquire. But I won't tell you. Only one thing I will say: that they enjoyed my company a great deal more in those days than you do now. I made myself a great deal more amusing. Ah! ah! my old sides shake to think of it. And what snow-storms I brought along with my white locks. Ah! ah! When I laughed and shook my hoary head, the earth became white, and the ice spread itself over the water, and the icicles got blue noses, and my fingers made everything look like frosted silver when I touched them accidentally. Ah! ah! ah! I was a jolly boy then, but now—well, well, it's quite altered. I can't expect you young people who have smoky trains, and I don't know how many posts in the day, to care whether I stay long with you or not. I hear you say quite sadly, 'Dear me! there's Christmas coming again; it seems but yesterday since he was here last.' The folks in 1570 said quite otherwise. Ah me! it is hard when the old people have to be put away on the shelf; but it's the way of the world;" and the old gentleman

melts into childish tears; and this is the cause why we so often have quite a mild Christmas. But in the time of good Queen Bess Father Christmas was a welcome guest, and his approach was hailed with delight and joy. Nowhere did he receive more greetings than at Sandy's Hollow. Perhaps Dame Pennyfeather was the only one who did not altogether expect him with unbounded pleasure, for her mind was weighed down by the beef and the venison which would have to be provided. Then the beer! What would her husband say if every man on the premises had not enough—and more than enough—to drink; so she must see that there was plenty brewed; and there must be the best malt put in, for the labourer knows what good beer is as well, nay, better than his superiors. There was also some present to be provided for each family, and her own household was not satisfied unless a gift was ready for them on Christmas Eve. Dame Pennyfeather was, however, quite equal to the occasion. Her daughter Eve wished many times in the morning that *her* duties were only made up of looking after a household. She could not see that going to visit the dairy, and ordering the maids, could even be considered as duties. If such were their names, she would willingly exchange them for hers, which were learning French and Latin, and hearing the pastor declaim against the wickedness of all Roman Catholic kings and countries. In this way he taught history. When he lectured upon Martin Luther his eyes would brighten, his telescopic figure lengthen out, his whole being seemed changed. Of late the poor man had been growing very thin, and an anxious frown had become habitual to him. The tender-hearted Annys soon noticed it, for her own troubles made her more susceptible to those of others.

"What has taken away your spirits, good sir?" asked she, about a week before Christmas, which that year fell on a Monday.

"I cannot confide my sorrows to you, good Mistress Annys; "I would not burden a young heart with the troubles of one who is not far off from his grave, but e'en you must know that we are living in sad times, and that wickedness is rampant."

"I know not that our day is more evil than other days," returned Annys, "but I know that troubles come upon the young as well as the old; still, I would fain relieve you if I could."

The pastor gazed a minute at Annys: he seemed to perceive for the first time that she too had a sad look about her which was not habitual. A silent sympathy was that day established between them, though they agreed in nothing except in thinking Jacob "a godly young man." I will not say that Annys at all considered that the pastor's sufferings could equal hers, but still she was sorry for him, and pity can never be wasted. On Christmas Eve, Ben and his sister were to have a fortnight's holiday, and it was with no little glee that they found the time drawing near. Instead of being more attentive they were less so, and this circumstance did not help to smooth the brow of the weary pastor. Eve, who had overheard the above conversation, bent over towards her sister and whispered:

"I know what makes the pastor sad."

"What then?" answered Annys; to which Eve replied, laughing:

"It is the wickedness of the world—Gog and Magog in especial."

"For shame, Eve! I would not joke about the sorrows of others: who knows whether thou mayest not thyself have grief some day."

Annys little knew that Eve did carry about with her the daily fear of her autumn escapade being discovered. Of late she had been happier, thinking it had all blown over; but she was daily tormented by Amelia, who would often insinuate that if Mistress

Eve did not do this, that, and the other to please her, she would mention to Master Pennyfeather how Silent Joe had been blamed unfairly. Annys knew naught about the pig-sty, or nothing would have hindered her from clearing Joe's reputation.

"You will come and share our Christmas dinner?" asked Annys of the pastor when lessons were over, and both were standing on the threshold of the door. "You must promise me that; and know you that Maurice returns to-morrow; and he would never forgive you if you came not to hear his many tales about Oxford. Maurice was ever a favourite with you."

"Yea, yea; he was a youth of much promise, and I say not but that he might have grown up to be a Puritan prop had he been left to my teaching; but I love him right well as it is."

Annys smiled, but it was a sorrowful smile; for as she stood there and saw the snow lying many inches thick on the hard ground, she also noticed that the pastor's black coat (of a most spare cut of cloth) was sadly threadbare, and could not protect him from the piercing wind. So she said playfully, "You are not going to one of your meetings, good pastor? It is not weather for you to be out in these cold snowy days; surely no one would wish to turn out from their fire-side and their cheerful homes."

"Nay, but that is then the time when the wolves prowl around and seize the flock; if any must be sacrificed it must surely be the shepherd, and not the lambs of the fold."

Annys did not understand to what he referred, or what he feared, but she did not laugh at him, only smiled once more as he went his way. As Annys turned into the hall she beheld no other than Rowland Whyte, who had come in whilst she had been studying her French. He looked more of a gallant than ever, and rose with so much haste and politeness that he let fall his feathered

cap, and as it rolled away Annys' first impulse was to pick it up. This somewhat spoiled the meeting, but Dame Pennyfeather, with true courtesy, made all smooth by saying that his cap had no intention of being displaced from its lodging, and she hoped Rowland Whyte would return as favourable an answer to her husband's invitation.

"I should indeed demur to thrust myself upon you at this busy time," quoth Rowland, "but that my heart yearns for the quiet pleasures of a country life, and my uncle, the squire, has betaken himself to the town. I shall therefore be much beholden to you, nay, much delighted." But Annys thought to herself that this fine gentleman would not have come to them had his uncle, the squire, been in the country.

"What news bring you from court?" demanded the dame, who, albeit she looked so prim and stern, was the one of the household who enjoyed court gossip or what she called "news." Rowland enjoyed no less giving out his ideas and opinions. It sounded mighty fine to tell his personal experience of court life to his country relations. They little knew what a mere court drudge the poor youth's post really was, and by his words they could not have guessed it.

"I have never seen Her Majesty so lively: in September we had a right royal journey to my Lord Hunsdon's mansion. It was quite a progress. The queen went in her canopied-chair, which was carried by six gentlemen. These were preceded by some knights of the Garter. The whole suite accompanied her, but by far the finest sight was the queen herself! You should have seen her jewels: pearls the size of—"

"Pigeons' eggs, doubtless," said the dame; "I have heard tell of them."

"And then her diamonds, how they sparkled! Ah! fair Mistress Annys, you should have been there to see it. Yet I make bold to say none could have vied with you as to freshness. Those ladies of the court are too much bedizened to please me: they are not to my taste."

"Methought you just now praised their jewels," said Annys, who felt in no mood for compliments.

"Yea, but there are fairer jewels which nature gives, and which art denies."

"And what say they of the Queen of Scots?" asked the dame

"They say so much that one cannot tell which is the truth. Some call her fairer than the fairest, and as innocent as a dove; but the greater part who are near the queen do but blacken the Scot's face and fame."

"If I were at court I should speak my mind," said Annys, "and I would not blow both hot and cold."

"Not to cool your porridge, and to warm your taper fingers?" asked Rowland laughing.

Annys saw that she could not bandy words with a courtier, so contented herself with saying, "I would cool my porridge and go with cold fingers in order to be consistent."

"And feel the cold wind for your pains. Aye, Dame Pennyfeather, you must ne'er send your daughter to court unless under safe guidance."

"Truly, our Annys is too simple for court life."

"Know you not that the simple are those most hard to deal with? The queen would rather deal with a knave than with one who was too simple. The first she could put into the Tower, but the second there is no getting rid of."

"Marry!" cried the yeoman, entering; "do I hear you speaking

treason, fair sir? But I came to find my little Annys. Look you, my pale flower, there is Bernet the smith, who is in great trouble about his child. It has the croup again, and his wife says that none but Dame Pennyfeather can cure it. Thou canst not go, dame; but couldest thou not tell Annys what thy remedies are, and she must tuck up her kirtle. We must e'en do our best for the poor, or we shall get no Christmas blessing. Well, Annys, what is thy mind?"

"I will willingly go, and if I do but get a little snowy there will no hurt be done. Prythee, good mother, tell me thy receipt."

"Would that I could go myself; but as I must not, listen, Annys. Thou must take a couple of onions—then hold them over a steaming vessel. Next thou must cut them into slices, and then apply them to the soles of the child's feet. Take care thou cover them up with flannel, or the virtue will be gone. I have never known the cure fail if done rightly. When the child sneezes thou must give it a drop of this stuff, but an it sneezes twice, put thou on more onions."

"Come, then, get thee gone forthwith," added her father, "and tell him I send him this crown to buy what is requisite."

"I question whether you could send him a kinder present than the sight of Mistress Annys' face," said Rowland. "Her look of amity would cure me were I never so sick;" but this time his compliment was wasted, for Annys was already in her chamber beginning to array herself for the walk.

The way to the smith lay through a lane leading by the side of the Buckstons' farm, so that one reason of Annys' willingness to go may be easily divined. But in truth she was always ready to perform any little act of kindness which lay in her power. As she passed out of the Pennyfeather estate she entered a lane called

Hawthorne Lane, and here the snow had drifted so deep that she found it hard work to get along. She was about half way when she saw a kneeling figure which made her heart beat. It was Jacob, she was sure, but what was he doing? He was kneeling low on the white surface, and in his hand was a tool. Annys was so glad that she walked all the more slowly. She liked watching him unperceived, for in truth she had not set eyes on him since the unhappy day when her father had withheld his consent. Jacob was too honourable to seek out Annys, though he would often linger on the outskirts of their domain to catch if he might but a glimpse of her. Annys, on the other hand, felt no compunction about speaking to Jacob, if she could only have the happiness of meeting him—and here he was! Her heart almost jumped into her mouth for joy, and as I have said she crept on gently. Presently a lusty voice behind the hedge sang out in no very musical tones—

"Come bring with a noise,
My merry merry boys,
The Christmas log to the firing.

This was accompanied with loud blows from an axe, which told plainly that the singer was thinking of Christmas and of the famous Yule log.

"Come then thou here, fellow," cried Jacob, without looking up; "instead of singing thyself hoarse, I would thou mightest give a helping hand this way. The poor thing is nearly dead, and I must make speed."

"Aye, aye, master!" answered the voice, and a young woodcutter came springing down from the top of the hedge, and very nearly alighted on Annys herself.

The youth's exclamation of dismay caused Jacob to look up,

and seeing Annys, the colour slightly mounted to his cheeks, but he did not get up or relax from his employment. Annys and the youth now approached at the same time, and the former saw at once that Jacob was trying to dig a poor sheep out of a drift.

"Ah! Mistress Annys," said Jacob, "I see you have a bottle in your basket; is it some cordial that could do this poor beast any good? I half doubt whether I shall save it now. Gently, Harry, the sheep can well feel, albeit it is half dead. I think thou hadst best run to our house and bring back some Hollands. Tell old Mary it is for the sheep which was once her pet lamb, and I trow she will give thee of the best."

"Very good, master, though I know not how I can make the speed you wish in this snow."

"Then don't stay there chattering like a woman. I beg pardon, Mistress Annys. I meant not women such as you." The boy went off with as much speed as was possible, then Jacob's manner changed, though he would not leave the sheep. Annys put down her basket, and gave a helping hand.

"Ha! Annys, Annys, my heart has been right sore on thy account since last we met. I would fain have sent thee some message, but I would do naught that was underhand."

"Dear Jacob, I knew that thou wouldest not change thy mind, so I cared not so much, and my own heart was fixed."

"Aye! say you so, Annys, sweetheart?"

"Thou couldest not doubt that?"

"I know not; at times all looks dark and lowering. My father is not overpleased at me; he still harps upon that mill-stream, albeit the poor brook is under snow and ice, and cannot flow much anywhere. Then he reviles thy father, and when I remonstrate, he calls me a church-ridden churl. He is old and has many infirmi-

ties, so I will not vex him with overmuch contradiction. But at times I am down-hearted."

"Poor Jacob! thou too hast much to bear. But thinkest thou not that at this blessed Christmas-tide all ill-feeling will be put aside? Oh! if thou couldest come to church on Christmas-day—and now I fear it will be Rowland Whyte who will be with us."

"What! that young vain gallant who robbed me of my dance on St. John's Eve?" Jacob was somewhat excited, and with a mighty effort he released the sheep and began rubbing its poor half-frozen body. Annys was trying to pour a little of the cordial down its throat, and did not see the angry flush on Jacob's face.

"Alas! Jacob, I must not tarry though these moments are precious. I am bound to a sick child—oh! my heart grieves about the religious differences. If it were not for these,—but prythee, Jacob, is there aught amongst the Puritans which alarms them? Lately the pastor has had a troubled look which saddens me."

"Aye, tender-hearted as ever, my Annys. I know not what to tell thee. Thou knowest that the pastor, though he looks so quiet, is very zealous in the cause. I know not, but I gather that he is a marked man, and that if he does not beware, he will be in danger."

"In danger? What of?" Annys looked frightened.

"Who knows? The Queen likes not all these secret meetings, and in truth they are mischievous. Indeed, Annys, I would not go were it not for my father—but he clings to his creed."

"Is there danger for thee, Jacob? Alack! there comes thy lad. I must not tarry longer or the child may fare ill."

At the youth's approach the lovers were obliged to return to their stiff ways and cold speech, so that Annys having seen the sheep in a fair way to recovery went forward, trying to make up for lost time. Yet her heart was lightened. It would not be difficult

to be patient and hope for better times, now she knew Jacob would not change towards her. And Christmas was coming; Christmas, which had such a good effect on the tempers of all the brave folks of "merrie England." Pleasant thoughts speed the way, so that Annys found herself at the cottage before she knew that she had got half way. It was pleasant too to act nurse and lady-bountiful, when she was looked upon as an angel of goodness. The onions did their part; whether nature herself might have restored her patient without the aid of Dame Pennyfeather's onions, it is not meet to inquire. When Annys reached the lane she was only too happy to see Jacob waiting for her; no one will doubt they had a pleasant talk and a pleasant walk; and as they had not sought the meeting, both of them were free from scruples of conscience. Jacob would not, however, step within the limit of the Pennyfeather land, though Annys begged him to come a little further. His strict view of what was right and honourable was to him sacred. Nothing could have made him go to the right hand or to the left, when he knew his road lay straight before him. Annys found it a great relief to meet with one who could so well direct her, and settle so easily her many uncertainties; if only Jacob had not had those Puritanical leanings, all would have been so happy. Nevertheless it was with a bright face she tripped into Sandy's Hollow, being met at the door by Ben and Eve, both exclaiming eagerly—

"Annys, know you that Rowland Whyte is going to stay for a fortnight at least? Shall we not have some happy days? for we must have a great deal of company in honour of such a gallant."

"Yes, yes, I know it; let me go; I must see that Maurice's chamber is prepared for him. *He* wants no grand company, but I fancy he will want a bed." Annys went to Maurice's chamber, but thinking more about Jacob than about her brother's bed.

CHAP. VI.—THE PASTOR DISAPPEARS.

THE winter sun had risen over the white land two days after this, and was tinging part of the landscape with a pretty rose-light, when Annys might have been seen standing on the door-step and looking eagerly over the broad surface of frozen snow. Her blue eyes, with their simple honest expression, nad an anxious sad look in them, which was touching in one so young. She had been standing there fully ten minutes when a step approached from behind her, and Maurice's voice said cheerfully, as he took hold of her round the waist—

"My sweet Annys, I have not half feasted my eyes on thee, why are you deserting me? Rowland Whyte has even stopped to listen to my stories of our grand feast. Ah! you should all see the chimney of Christ Church. That good cardinal had a right loyal idea of what cooking should be."

"What, Maurice! hast thou learned to eat an ox entire since yonder city of Oxford received thee in her arms. If so be, thou must not bide at home for Christmas. But, brother, my mind is sore troubled this morning about the pastor; I have been looking along the road for him, but it is all in vain. My heart misgives me. I feel sure some mischief has befallen him."

"What! because he has shirked his morning's teaching? I

think he did right well. Eve is a very mad-cap at the idea of the Christmas dances and good cheer, and can settle down to nothing. As to Ben—"

"Nay, it is not that; but oh! of late his face has been so sorrowful, and he has been wearying himself to death with his long tramps about the country. There has been some mischief, I fear me."

"Ah! say you so? Have the Puritans made Sandhill too hot for them? Faith, I am not sorry; they should be put down with a high hand."

"If they had but one neck, as Nero would say; but, Maurice, they are acting up to what they deem right, and a man can do no more."

"Right, Annys; meseems thou art grown in wisdom. What is it that has filled thy head with such wise sayings? but come, I see my father in the yard. The snow is so crisp it will not hurt thee, and we will go and ask him."

The two accordingly laid the matter before Master Pennyfeather, who, as we have said, had a warm heart, and who had always acted kindly towards the poor pastor. He, however, did not think so seriously of the non-appearance of Mr. Hapgood. Doubtless he had caught a cold in his head, or had some other ailment.

"Then he will want some one to nurse him," said Annys, "though I never in my lifetime have known him have a cold; but of late his coat must often have allowed much wind to penetrate. Will you not go and see, father?"

Master Pennyfeather demurred; there was much to see after. At last he said, "Thou hast foolish ideas, Annys, but a right tender heart. Come, I will promise thee that I will go and order

him a turkey. It shall be sent up to his room, and he can eat it during the whole of Christmas-day. Will that satisfy thee?"

"Thou shouldest add a new coat, Annys thinks," said Maurice.

"And make her go without one for herself, eh?"

"Yes, indeed, father, that will I right gladly do; but I was going to ask thee if I might accompany thee. A woman can always say the most cheering words if illness is the matter."

"Thou thinkest over much of thy sex, Annys, but a woman will e'en have a way, so go and get thee ready, wench; and Maurice, do thou see if that fool Joe is doing his duty out yonder, whilst I take Annys to the village, that is if thou hast not become too fine a scholar to look after out-of-door work."

"A scholar has more sense than a gallant!" said Maurice, who pitied Rowland for finding nothing better to do than to tease Eve and laugh at Ben.

Very soon after Annys and her father set out, for the snow was firm enough to render walking agreeable. The maiden had slipped on a long half-tight pelisse. It was well quilted and trimmed with fur. She did not forget to hang her purse to her girdle, thinking she would add a few delicacies to her father's turkey. The young serious face was an attractive sight, as with a quiet determination she struggled to keep up with her father's pace. Annys had always her mind set on what she undertook; it was this honesty of purpose which made her such a useful right hand to her mother. During the walk she mentioned her fears about the poor pastor's safety. He was so unselfish that if there was any danger to be encountered he would be the first to undertake it. Master Pennyfeather would not, however, believe in danger. In half an hour they reached Sandhill, and walked quickly up the street lying on this side of the river. The bridge had to be crossed,

and here the wind blew so hard that Annys clung to her father. Very soon they were at the entrance of the further village, and then they found themselves in front of the worthy Roche's shop, which was plentifully supplied with turkeys, all looking as if even in death they were mourning over their untimely end. Roche, who had fears of not selling all his stock, had stationed himself on his door-step, and would dart out on the passers-by and inquire whether they had yet bought their Christmas turkey. On seeing Master Pennyfeather he was quite eloquent on the merits of his beautiful birds, digging his fingers as he spoke with much energy into the ribs of the departed ones.

"Ah! ah! Roche! and so you can see turkey written on my face? Well, I tell thee there are a dozen depicted on thy features. However, tell us thy price, and if it be not exorbitant I will surely buy one."

Roche named his price, and was further going to relate how no other turkeys in the country were as cheap, when Annys interrupted him by quickly exclaiming,

"Good Roche! we wanted to know how Mr. Hapgood fares, as he came not to Sandy's Hollow this day or yesterday. Is he indisposed? Pray tell us!"

Roche's manner changed at once, and he became very mysterious; next he beckoned them into his shop.

Poor Annys' heart sank within her: her fears were certainly not unfounded if this mystery was necessary.

"Look you, sir, it was a sad thing, a very sad thing."

"But what was it? Speak out, man, and tell us what was sad."

"Ah, sir! that is it. I was told that my eyes must be turned away, and my tongue must hold its own counsel."

"Tut, tut! man, show some grains of sense, and out with the business."

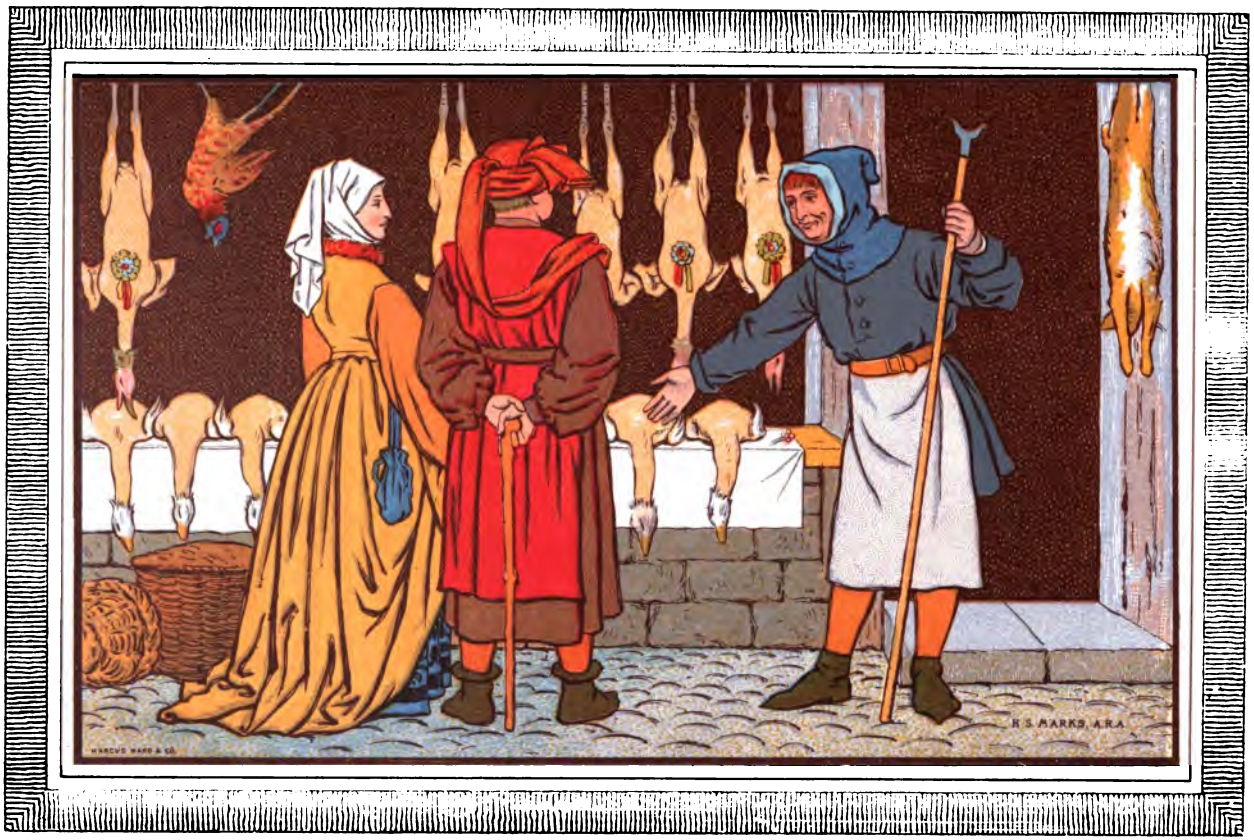
"He was a good man, sir, and I have naught to find fault with his way of living under my roof, unless it is that he kept the fasts so rigidly, albeit no Popish priest; but I must say, sir, that I have oft-times been much annoyed at his lengthy sermons as he stepped out and in of my house. Though my wife will bear me witness that I never listened to them, and was as deaf as if my ears had been sealed with wax. No, no, there will be no one found to say that I was aught but a good Protestant and a right loyal butcher!"

"Out upon thee, man! no one is asking after thy welfare."

"Ha, sir! I was coming to the history if you will have patience: one must first pluck a fowl before one can get at the good flesh. It was even in this way that the thing took place: I was sitting in my parlour, my wife being in bed, and the night cold and lonesome, when I heard a great knocking at the outer door. I wondered for some time who was the neighbour who was so late a visitor, when the knocks were repeated with greater strength. I knew Mr. Hapgood was in bed, and I could in no way guess; so, determined to go and see, I rose from my seat—"

"Well, well, let us suppose you have opened the door," said Master Pennyfeather impatiently.

"Let us then suppose this, sir, an it please you, if so you will but hear half my tale. What was my surprise in beholding half-a-dozen soldiers, who had evidently walked a good six miles in the snow; I might venture to say seven. I prayed them of their courtesy to tell me their business; thereupon they said they had come to seize the person of Mr. Hapgood, known to be a disobedient and turbulent fellow. I told them that I verily knew Mr. Hapgood, but that he was as quiet a man as any in the realm. Indeed, that



"Ye BUTCHER ROCHE_GOOD TURKEYS & BAD NEWS."

he could talk by the hour, but that his words could disturb no one. They, however, would not listen long to me, and bid me go and wake up Mr. Hapgood, and bid him rise and come along with them. I was very loath, but was forced to obey; and when I entered his room I found he was indeed awake, and was dressing himself. Before I could speak he said, 'I know all, good Mr. Roche, and will be downstairs anon;' whereupon I begged he would not go with them, but he replied that the shepherd must jump into the lion's mouth if necessary. It was so cold that I insisted on giving him my own coat, and he promised to send it back or its equivalent in money. When he walked down the stairs the soldiers, that is, one of their number, came forward and said he was apprehended for his insubordination to rule, and for holding secret meetings, and could only save himself by delivering up the names of those who had attended; whereupon he spoke out boldly and said, 'Never! if ye tear me limb from limb. Do what ye list with me;' and so the whole party went out into the cold night, and I saw no more of them, save that one soldier came and told me to keep the matter quiet, and to go on as if naught had happened; but I must not be accounted to blame for having told you."

Annys was shedding tears, and when the story was told she seized her father's arm, saying earnestly, "I beseech thee, good father, to get him released. Where was he taken, and who should be asked about the matter?"

"Not so quick, Annys; I fear this is on account of his religious opinions, and I would rather he had been taken to prison for committing murder than for following his conscience! Knowest thou where they took him?"

"Nay, by my troth, I know not; for it was a bitter night, and I looked not even whether they went up or down the street."

"I know who can help us!" cried Annys; "our kinsman, Rowland Whyte, for the order must come from court."

"Quite right, Annys; thou hast a clever head, though it is not too large. Come then home. These are times when a man should not hang out his colours too plainly, good Roche: good-morrow to you. There will be fine doings here on Saturday, and many a one will deserve to be put into the drunkard's tub on the morrow."

"Aye, aye! but I take good care it shall not be Roche," quoth this worthy, who was not very sorry to see his company depart, for he had noticed several passers-by who, had they been enough persuaded, might have bought one of his turkeys.

Annys on the way home told her father how she knew that lately these secret meetings had done much harm, and how a certain Mr. Fox had been diligently preaching and trying to set the people against the church. She did not, however, tell how she had come by her news, and as Master Pennyfeather did not too closely inquire, Eve again escaped detection. In the meantime she had not been employing herself in as praiseworthy a way as her sister, and had let her mischievous tongue run away with her and her sense of right

CHAP. VII.—TOO GOOD A BONFIRE.

THE master of Sandy's Hollow was in a very bad temper when he entered the yard of his homestead. Things had not gone as they should have done, at least as Master Pennyfeather had intended. The pastor was so much connected with his family that some evil tongues might blazon abroad suspicious facts, and thereby bring him into trouble.

Woe to the unlucky person who first crosses the path of a man in a temper against nobody in particular! To-day the yeoman's wrath burst upon Joe's head as he was lazily wondering whether the Yule log had best be brought within-doors by him, or whether there was the least chance of its bringing itself in.

"Come, you vagabond, you lazy dog, bestir yourself! In all my life I never saw such a slow fellow, by my faith!"

Joe, too, was in a bad temper from various causes which we need not inquire into, but Joe's temper was in no ways like Master Pennyfeather. This latter's humour resembled a thunder-cloud, the former's a volcano. The first eruption was visible when, instead of patiently listening to his master's rebuke as his master meant him to do, he gave an angry kick to the log, as much as to say, "Would that this were the master!" The yeoman understood this well enough, and the thunder rolled, then at last burst. We need

not put down the string of appellatives which regaled Joe's ears. In the midst Annys put her small hand on her father's shoulder, saying, "Come then, dear father, forgive Joe, and let us quickly re-enter the house; time presses." Alas! her father had already forgotten what Joe's offence was, and so could not forgive it. When he had exhausted his breath he rewarded himself by dismissing Joe from his service.

"There, rascal, get you gone; I will have no more of such lazy good-for-nothing dogs." This done, he wiped his forehead and entered the house.

Joe had been quite calmed by his master's last outburst. He took up his jacket, which lay on the ground, shook his fist at the empty space which had lately contained Master Pennyfeather, and then muttering, "Awaw, awaw; he'll soon have a Yule log and bonfire big enough for his big words to burn in!" he turned away and walked off.

"A word with you, if it so please you, good kinsman," said Rowland Whyte to the yeoman, and at the same time making such a bow that Master Pennyfeather thought with pride on every letter of his name. Aye! it was one to be proud of when the great family of Pennyfeather could reckon amongst its ranks a courtly man who knew how to make such a bow! His brow cleared, and the storm being over, the clouds rolled away.

"Yes, yes, kinsman, one word, and as many as you will; but first let little Annys tell you what has befallen that worthy Hapgood." Annys did so, and Rowland smiled at her tale, especially when she added imploringly, "Oh, kind kinsman! I pray you use your influence at court and get the poor man released. He is so harmless, and moreover, so good!"

"If you get him released, I pray you, Rowland, get him also

transported," joined in Eve, who was in a flippant mood; "I am right sick of being taught by him."

"I fain would oblige you both, fair coz, but I revere the race of Pennyfeathers too much to care to endanger another head of them. Know you not that one has—"

"Tut, tut! no one could doubt me! and I trow my head is as firmly fixed on my shoulders as most men's. Ah, Rowland! I see thou hast it not in thy power to help us in this matter; but come with me in private and out with thy matter, now mine is at an end;" and the two men retired.

"I know well what he is going to ask our father," said Eve, approaching her sister and looking mysterious, so as to excite her curiosity. "Why, Annys, how sad thou art! surely the pastor's fate hangs not so heavy on thy mind?"

"He was always kind to me, but I have other matters to sadden me."

"Annys, what will you give me for telling you a secret?"

"Come, Eve, leave me then alone to think, and go seek Ben that he may see after the Yule log. My father has dismissed Joe."

"Good riddance of bad rubbish, say I; but my secret, Annys; well, I must tell thee: Rowland Whyte is such a fair-spoken gentleman! he has been saying a hundred pretty things to me whilst you were out; amongst others said he, 'And would you not take me for a brother, Mistress Eve?' That was all because I said I would have naught to do with a courtier. I could lay a wager he is now asking thy hand from our father."

"Eve, how canst thou talk so!"

"Aye, but I do;" and hardly had she spoken the words when Master Pennyfeather and Rowland entered the room with smiling faces. Her father noticed Annys' scarlet cheeks.

"Eh, eh! what little bird has been whispering? Come, my Annys, spare thy blushes a little; thou must e'en look up and listen to the fair proposals that Rowland is about—"

"Nay, nay, father! indeed I am—" began poor Annys in her confusion, making no sense of her words, which allowed Rowland to believe that he was coyly accepted; and before anything else could be said, shouts were heard of,—"Here it comes—make way—make way for our bonny Yule log!" All but Annys and her father rushed out to give a helping hand with the Yule log over the threshold, as it was thought most unlucky not to have laid at least one finger on the wood before it had passed the door sill.

"Annys," said the yeoman (sternly for him), "what means this scene? If it be Jacob thou art hankering after, I tell thee plainly thou wilt never be his wife, and so thou hadst best set thy face towards Rowland. Such a gallant, such a comely young man, and so fair-spoken: he has just told me that he will take thee to court, and that the queen will raise thee high. Eve may yet, through thee, marry a rich nobleman, who knows?"—then seeing Annys still weeping—"I command thee, wench, to have done with these fooleries, and to give some word of welcome to thy future husband, or by my troth—but here he comes. Good Rowland, Annys will follow out my wishes, and thou must forgive her if surprise and—but young people understand each other;" and so saying, the master, glad to have got over the part of an angry father, was happy enough to laugh over the Yule log.

Annys was much too shy to utter a word in answer to a string of courtly phrases, which indeed she scarcely heard; and when the hall became full with people, and she was free to retire, she went to her chamber and cried her heart out over the old pot which had once contained the orpine!

"Hurrah for Christmas tide!" Every one ought to be happy, thought Annys, but she was not; to her it was, "Woe to Christmas Eve." At this minute Dame Pennyfeather hurried into the room, not being aware of what had happened.

"Come, Annys, haste thee below stairs, for such a company has come in! the maids and myself can scarce serve all the folk. The song is just about to tune up: thou hast missed the placing of the log." The girl dared not disobey, and before she could reach the hall, music or noise of all description began, and then burst forth the song of the Yule log!

"Come, bring with a noise,
My merry merry boys,
The Christmas log to the firing;
While my good dame she
Bids ye all be free,
And drink to your hearts' desiring.

"Light the new block, and
For good success in his spending.
On your psalteries play,
That sweet luck may
Come while the log is a-teending.

"Drink now the strong beer,
Cut the white loaf here
The while the meat is a-shredding,
For the rare mince-pie
And the plums stand by
To fill the paste that's a-kneading."

"This is blythesome, sweet Mistress Annys," whispered Rowland in her ear, "and I wager that 'sweet luck' will soon be ours."

"I love not such sport," returned she shortly; "and see, sir, your help is wanted to decorate the rafters; I pray you lend a hand."

Thus dismissed, Rowland went among the crowd, and before

the evening was over had said some pretty speeches to all the girls in the room, and had drunk as freely as if he were not a courtier. Annys thought with a bitter sigh that he did not behave as one much heart-smitten. Jacob would not have done the same. Annys could not guess what the night would bring forth, or she would not have bemoaned herself so much, I fancy.

It was twelve o'clock at night. Sandy's Hollow at last was quiet, the Yule log had burnt down quite low, the dogs lay sleeping on the mats, here and there a cat walked softly about, and Christmas Eve was dead. One of the inhabitants of the house was, however, tossing restlessly on her soft bed, and this person was no other than Eve. I very much fear that her supper had disagreed with her, for in spite of everything she could do, sleep would not come. Annys had fallen asleep in the act of shedding tears, but as Eve did not know this, she began envying her sister's quiet repose. Presently thinking that if she went to look out of the window she might become suddenly sleepy, she softly got out of bed, walked across the room on tip-toe, and drew away the heavy curtain. The night was very dark, but the snow lighted up the ground. Eve was just about to go back to bed, seeing nothing to amuse her, when she suddenly perceived a dark object against the snow, and the light of a lantern. Presently the light was put out and the figure disappeared round a corner. Eve, whose courage was not of any high order, made but one leap back into bed, and had soon hidden her head under the clothes. In spite of this, sleep came not, and for an hour more she lay bemoaning her fate and inventing a pathetic tale for the next day. Her waking thoughts at last became confused, and she dreamt that it was Midsummer Eve instead of Christmas. It was quite warm; the sun was shining, and Ben was just going to light the bonfire.

"Oh! Ben, wait there till I can get out of the smoke," she said in her dream; but this woke her. She started up in bed to find the room was indeed full of smoke. I am sorry to say she entirely forgot her sister, but in one instant she had opened her door and stepped into the passage. The room the sisters occupied was, as I have before mentioned, at one end of a wing of the old house, and quite distant from the centre of the dwelling. What was Eve's horror to find the passage so filled with smoke that she could not breathe! The end of the wing must be on fire! Her door banged to, and she flew through the smoke, taking but two seconds to reach her mother's room.

"Mother! father! the house is on fire!" But the discovery had already been made by the servants, who, in all sorts of costumes, came rushing towards Master Pennyfeather's chamber. Amelia was there, wringing her hands and saying she knew she was on fire, and of course would be burnt.

"Hold thy tongue, Amelia!" cried Eve; "why think only of thyself: are we not all in danger? Fetch me a kirtle and shawl."

"What! not along that passage, Mistress Eve! How came you out?"

I need not describe the scene of bustle which ensued; the panic was so great that all the household turned out of doors except the yeoman. His wife had found some difficulty in waking him, but once out of bed he was all activity. Setting everyone at work with authority, he cried—"It is only the wing, my men, that is on fire! Don't let it be said the fire conquered a Pennyfeather! There, now! let the women keep out of the way, and let us get as much water as possible!"

The snow was melting round the burning wing, and made the footing dangerous. It was a glorious scene, however, and Rowland

Whyte, who being far removed from the part on fire, had therefore had time to dress himself almost elegantly, said calmly,

"It is worth seeing Dame Pennyfeather; I would not have missed the sight for twenty marks!"

At this minute Eve rushed up almost beside herself with grief. "Oh mother! mother! Annys! It is all my fault; I forgot her: I pray you, Rowland, save her! See! see! up there on that first story! The fire has not yet reached her, but the smoke—oh help! help!"

The yeoman heard these words and turned pale. "Annys! Annys! how is this? What! still in her room? Cowards! thieves! rascals! why did you not tell me? Here, James, Bracy, your weight in gold if you can get the ladders. I forgot; here is Rowland Whyte. Ah, my boy! I know thy heart has leapt up there already though—but come, haste, Rowland; there is the door; that way may still be safe. What, man! why tarry?"

"I would indeed risk everything," said Rowland, edging back, "but, good sir, this is an impossibility. Eve had best shout to her to throw herself out of the window."

The men were now bringing the ladders, but the confusion was great. The yeoman, however, found time to say, "Thou craven! thinkest thou such as thou shalt have her? I would rather the flames devoured her. Art not thou ashamed to be standing there, in lace ruffs, to boot?" and so saying, the despairing father rushed towards the ladder and was himself going to ascend when a firm, strong hand put him aside.

"This is my business, good Master Pennyfeather; you cannot endanger your life: if I die it will have been for her."

It was Jacob Buckstone, who, having seen the fire, had run all the way from his farm, and had been greeted with the news that

Annys had not been able to escape, for that the passage in the wing was impassable. It was no easy matter to ascend the ladder, for the gable was tottering already, the fire below having eaten away some of its supports; moreover, no Annys appeared at the window, which was closed. Jacob almost feared she had been suffocated before she was aware of her danger. Carefully and steadily he mounted, knowing that more haste so often makes less speed, and that Annys' only chance might thus be lost. He had no time to feel anxiety; his whole mind was concentrated on the work in hand. At last his head was level with the sill of the window, and raising his voice he cried, "Annys, Annys! haste, I beseech thee!" Nothing answered him, and with one blow he burst through the glass and looked in. A sudden gust of wind happily cleared the room for one instant of the smoke, but what availed this? Jacob with a glance could see no one; only a heap of clothes in one corner, which in the agony of the moment he fancied must be Annys lying dead. It needed only this sight to make him desperate. With one bound he entered the room and felt his way to the corner. There was hope certainly; the heap of tumbled blankets contained no living person. But where could she be? Even the brave Jacob dared not open the door of the room, knowing well that the draught would end all hope of escape. He now heard voices from below shouting something; he heard some word of warning about the tottering ladder, but he could not understand it. If Annys was dead he cared very little whether his means of escape were slender; indeed, quite a happy feeling came over him at the thought of dying for her, perhaps with her. The smoke was clouding his intellect; his head felt dazed, but he made a few steps towards the window, unconsciously seeking to get out of the stifling atmosphere. More shouts from below, a great cloud

of smoke rolling slowly up, then a voice distinctly heard above everything, and that voice awoke Jacob from his torpor. It was Annys' accent, and he seized the ladder and shook it; still the maiden called, "Oh, Jacob! Jacob! make haste; I am safe, quite safe! oh Jacob!" The feet which had been so steady but a few minutes before, now seemed almost unable to guide themselves, and the strong hands could barely clutch the top of the ladder. Jacob appeared from below like a drunken man staggering on the edge of a precipice. The flames only a few yards from him began to throw out their long, thin, cruel arms, as if eager to clutch their prey, but at every second they hid them quickly away as a bucket of water was poured over them. Then how spitefully they hissed, angry at the disturbance of their plan; but again they darted forth, despite their foes, and curled upward with more eagerness than before. Hurrah! hurrah! why, they have almost touched the giant who is descending that frail wooden ladder. Poor fool! does he think to escape them? Ah! ah! he had best be somewhat quicker then. No! no! now they have him: they wind their flame-fingers about his hands and force him to let go.

There was a cry of despair from Annys, then Jacob fell heavily to the ground. Happily the height was not great, and gentle fingers came at once to his help. Annys, who would not be restrained, pushed her way through the crowd and knelt down on the earth to gaze into his face. The silly one took his motionless and closed eyes as signs that death had taken him from her, and cried out,

"Oh Jacob, Jacob! would that I had died instead of thee, alack!"

A groan was her answer, but never was groan more welcome: the girl's spirits rose immediately, and seeing Maurice she said,

"Dear brother, help me to carry him into the barn, away from this bustle. Ah! I forgot; thy poor arm is hurt: why am I to be the cause of so much pain?" Two men were, however, ordered by Master Pennyfeather to do her bidding, and very soon ministering to the sick man gave Annys plenty of occupation. The rest of the women followed their example and retired to the barn, whilst the men renewed their efforts toward putting out the fire. Master Pennyfeather, relieved from anxiety, worked like a very Hercules, and before five o'clock struck from the rude hall clock there was a shout of, "Three cheers for Sandy's Hollow and good Master Pennyfeather!"

The worthy man doffed his fur cap and said reverently, "All praise to God, my men, that He has left some portion standing; aye, enough to shelter us and any poor folk who may pass by this night. Now look you carefully round, my boys, so as not to tread on any burning brand." So saying, he left the farm men to get the rubbish somewhat in order, and went to the barn to see with his own eyes that all were safe and sound.

CHAP. VIII.—FAITHFUL LOVE.

IN spite of the night's occurrences the whole party, except Rowland Whyte and Jacob Buckston, appeared at the breakfast-table. The long Sunday prayers which the dame usually insisted on were, however, replaced by shorter ones, for none had risen too early. As may be imagined, there were many questions asked about the fire. Annys was called upon to tell how it was that, when all were expecting her to appear at her bedroom window, she had suddenly rushed in amongst them, and by her entreaties had persuaded Jacob to save himself.

"Ah, Annys! thou hast very nearly been his death; as it is, the poor fellow's left arm has a serious burn!" said the dame.

"He says he does not mind," replied Annys, looking down. "I am indeed grieved at the business, for neither can poor Maurice move his right shoulder in consequence of me."

"Tell us then how it happened!" cried everyone.

"When I woke I found the room filled with smoke, and guessing at once that something was the matter, I jumped out of bed and dressed with all speed. I saw Eve was gone. Then I tried to open the door; but in so doing I let in such a current of hot air, that I was near being suffocated, and hastily allowed it to shut again. Not knowing what next to do, I ran to the window and

saw many of you bustling about, but no one heard or saw me. I was indeed beginning to fear when I heard a great knock, and the door bursting open revealed Maurice, his head rolled up in a wet towel. Ah! Maurice, I could barely refrain from laughing, but there was no time even for that. 'Soak your towel,' he cried, 'and do the same;' then he rushed again into the burning, stifling passage, dragging me after him, for I could see nothing, and very nearly fainted. The rest you know."

"But thy arm, my boy," asked the dame, "how came that hurt?"

"A mere knock, mother: before we were well out a beam gave way and deposited itself on my shoulder; happily I did not receive its full force, or I should not be listening to these tales—but here comes Rowland."

Accordingly this young man entered, trying by courtly bows and fair speeches to make the yeoman forget his lack of courage. But the yeoman's pride was only skin deep; beneath this lay a true honest English heart. He was deeply hurt, for in spite of Rowland being a Pennyfeather and, moreover, betrothed to his daughter, he had for ever disgraced both that name and the name of gentleman.

"Good morrow, good kinsfolk," began Rowland; "I am indeed charmed to see that the worthy Dame and Master Pennyfeather have received no harm. There, too, sits the wise Maurice with a knightly scarf about his shoulder. Ah! Eve, good-morrow! and the blessed infants, too, I am glad to see are alive and well;" then approaching Annys, who had not before noticed that his empty chair was beside her, he half whispered, "Ah, fairest Annys! a misfortune at the beginning of happiness prevents one from coming at its close: 'tis best so."

The yeoman, who only waited for some opportunity, burst forth angrily, "Aye! aye! 'tis best so indeed. I took you for other metal, sir, when I offered my daughter's hand and heart. By my faith, you never possessed her heart, and her hand you shall never have if my name is Benjamin Pennyfeather!"

Annys, who dreaded scenes (though this one caused her heart to beat with gladness), now interposed, saying their kinsman was needing his meal; but Rowland, with much show of anger and injured pride, said—

"I have heard that my uncle, the squire, has returned to his domain; I will therefore no longer trouble the worthy yeoman with my presence. I see well that the wind has changed, and that some low Puritan is now in favour. I would not for the world that the court should hear that Rowland Whyte associates with rebels; so I will take my leave, not without thanking the worthy Pennyfeather for this timely warning, which I hope will at least keep my Pennyfeather head on my shoulders. Adieu! good dame; to you, fair Mistress Annys, I do but say au-revoir!" So saying, the gallant went forth with the step of a marquis out into the fresh morning air, and was soon seen to ride away.

"May he fall into a drift!" murmured Ben: "I never before set my eyes on such a craven."

"Hold your tongue, sirrah!" cried the yeoman, who now wished Rowland Whyte safe back. What was he going to say at court about him? Some treasonous lies, doubtless. But no man ever likes his enemy to go away in a bad mood, and, moreover, without his breakfast!

"What an unfortunate man I am!" he cried, walking uneasily about the hall: "here I must needs have a daughter with two lovers, neither of which please me, and besides this there are three

more wenches who may bring me into the same trouble by-and-by; who knows if their lovers may not be of the popish religion next time?"

"There will be plenty of time to bemoan thyself about Eve and the twins when thy house is built up," remarked his wife sternly. "Come, Annys, help me to prepare some cool bandages for Jacob's arm; perhaps thy father will go and inquire into last night's business. Did any see some late stragglers about who might have done this mischief?"

Eve then told what she had seen, at which Amelia, who had not left the room, said it must be that wicked, deceitful Joe. Here she burst into tears, and being reproved by the dame, excused herself by saying that the master had dismissed Joe, whereupon he had told her, Amelia, that she would see a Yule log that evening. Poor Master Pennyfeather seemed overwhelmed with his troubles, and telling Maurice and Ben to follow him, said he would inform the needful authorities forthwith, so that the person of Silent Joe might be seized.

"Ah, Annys!" said Jacob as she entered his room with her mother, "I am sorry to occasion this trouble: when this arm is dressed I will not burden you any more with my presence. In the meanwhile the sight of thee is a cordial. Forgive me, good dame; I cannot refrain my tongue from telling her so."

"Thou wert a foolish fellow, Jacob, last night; but Annys had better hold thy hand whilst I dress thy arm."

"Nay, I can bear pain," answered Jacob rather proudly.

"No need to tell us that after last night;" and Jacob, catching sight of Annys' tender eyes, held out his hand, only too happy to be able to clasp hers. But the maiden did not find it a very happy position; she almost fainted at the sight of the burnt arm,

and it needed all the self-possession she could muster to prevent her from rushing out of the room. Ah! it is fortunate that women have brave loving hearts as well as weak nerves—by the first they can conquer the second.

In the evening the whole family once more assembled together round a blazing fire in the hall, and this time Annys looked radiant with happiness, for Jacob sat next to her, albeit her father had said nothing more on the subject of love or lovers. Nothing could be heard of the perpetrators of the mischief, which might have proved so fatal to some of those happy faces now lit up with the firelight, which flickered fantastically over them and over the old dark rafters.

"I have many thanks to offer you, Master Pennyfeather, for letting me abide here last night, and to you, dame, for all your care of me."

"Tut, tut, man! say nothing of that," replied the yeoman. 'I've sent down to thy father to tell him thou must bide here awhile. That is, thou must ask Annys if she will let thee. Ah! the little bird blushes and says nothing; but what says the adage eh, Maurice?—'Silence giveth consent.' Well, well, I would not have chosen thee, Jacob, I tell thee plainly; but there, what is to be done when two obstinate young heads think they know better than their elders? As to being a Puritan, I would all good Protestants would act as thou didst last night. Dame Pennyfeather, what say you?"

"I would not think other than thou thinkest," was the guarded answer of the dame, who rather fretted over the Rowland Whyte affair.

Annys for all answer went and kissed her father in a right English manner, and then returning to her former position, placed

her hand in Jacob's uninjured palm: it is very much doubted whether it was taken from that resting-place for the remainder of the evening. "Ah, Jacob, I am so happy!" whispered Annys for the one minute they were alone, "and I thought yesterday that I never should be again. Now whatever happens I can never be sad again, and Christmas will once more be the happiest time of my life." Ah, Annys! Annys! clouds and sunshine come not once only. This lesson is not yet learned.

CHAP. IX.—CHRISTMAS-DAY IN THE EVENING.

"A HAPPY CHRISTMAS to ye!" To be sure: why should any one be sad on such a day? Poor and rich, high and low, all share in the highest sense that happiness, so that there is no mockery in the good yeoman's words as he walks round to all his cottages, saying in his own cheery voice, "A merry Christmas to you!" First, there is the church-going. All the family go that day, even the twins, for all house-work has been prepared beforehand. Then when they once more return, Ben, who has run on in front, meets them at the door, shouting and singing till his throat is hoarse, and presents each one with an immense piece of holly. Then what a bustle there is, what a settling of plates, what a shouting for Annys and Jacob! who are at last discovered bending over an old pot where an orpine plant once grew. Never mind; Annys had watered that pot well with her tears, and foolish Jacob was going to keep it as a relic.

"Dear me! dear me!" says old Father Christmas, laughing very loud, "how foolish lovers can be, to be sure; nearly as foolish as poor old Father Christmas himself; however, everyone has their turn, so *that* makes it even. Come now, boys, give me room; I am the herald of the wonderful Boar's Head!" Then follows a long procession of men-servants and maid-servants, in the midst

of which may be seen the boar's head all decorated with holly, and a grim smile illuminating his face. There are few who can smile at their own death, but then few have such a fuss made over them. As the boar is placed on the table Maurice gets up and sings in his full sweet tones—

"Caput Apri defero
Reddens laudes Domino.

The Boar's Head in hand bring I,
With garlands gay and rosemary;
I pray you all sing merrily,
Qui estis in convivio.

"The Boar's Head I understand
Is the chief service in this land;
Look wherever it be fande,
Servite cum cantico.

"Be glad, Lords, both more and lasse,
For this hath ordained our steward
To cheer you all this Christmasse
The Boar's Head with mustàrd!"

After which all the family begin the real business of eating. No tasting of morsels in those days; people would have been ashamed of having ten courses handed round and "just touching" say five of them. No, no, no; they *had* a dinner and they *made* a dinner, and that is why the brave English could fight those poor Spaniards, and snap their fingers at an Armada. But enough of this: I will not make your mouth water with the descriptions of that dinner; suffice it to say it was a very good one, and that the sight of the happy faces round the board was a feast in itself. I must proceed with my story. Many neighbours had come on this Christmas-day to see the burnt wing of Master Pennyfeather's house, and many were the inquiries into the cause of the

conflagration. Anathemas were hurled at Silent Joe, who, not being there to hear them, minded them not at all. These wonderings were brought to a close by the yeoman saying in his usual happy, good-natured voice,

"Come, neighbours, let us amuse ourselves. If that wretch is guilty he has at least not the pleasure of thinking we are burnt out. Here come the fiddlers, and here is the hall. I must first introduce to you my future son-in-law, whose gallant conduct is in everyone's mouth. His left arm, you see, is useless; but we, neighbours, shall watch to see whether he will not manage to foot it with Annys. Come, Jacob, take her hand and open the ball!" No sooner said than done, and Jacob's whole countenance seemed changed by happiness. What will not joy accomplish in the beautifying of a face? Joy just touches with soft fingers the eyes, and at once they become radiant and beautiful; next he kisses the mouth, and the curves seem to alter and appear lovely. Nay, joy has sometimes pressed his fingers into some soft cheek and left there a dimple; but sometimes he does all this and then flies away, saying, "I only wanted just to show you what I was like, you see; I cannot stay with you to-day; perhaps some other day I will see you again, but who knows?" Ah! who knows indeed if the joy of the days that are no more will ever return?

The dance had begun at two o'clock in the afternoon, for late balls were not in fashion just then.

About half-past four, when Annys had sunk into a chair quite tired out with dancing and happiness, some loud unmusical voices were heard singing outside. It was growing dusk, and the sounds agreed well with the hour.

"Ah! chance has brought us some stray carol singers," remarked Jacob, "but they are behindhand."

"ye BIRDS OF EVIL OMEN."

"Nay, they are but strolling minstrels; I will go and offer them some of our new brew; it is first-rate, some say. Ah, Jacob! I feel as if I could make everyone as happy as I am myself. This time on Saturday that dreadful kinsman of ours was sitting by me, but I remember not one word he said."

"Thou hast a short memory, my Annys; perhaps thou hast forgotten what I told thee on the bowling-green."

"No, no, no; of that converse I remember every word. Ah! I had nearly forgotten the singers;" and snatching up a large jug of beer and a tumbler, Annys hurried to the door; at once the sound of voices and flutes ceased. Annys beheld two men and a boy, who looked with longing eyes in at the windows where the merry party were seated. One of the three was an old red-faced peasant, who, if he could sing at all, certainly could make no heavenly music. As soon as he saw Annys he tucked his fiddle under his arm and gazed with greedy eyes at the glass. The other man was tall and strong, looking far too hale a man to turn beggar, for these wandering minstrels were not much better. The lad had a round good-humoured face, but evidently did not find playing the flute a very agreeable Christmas-day occupation.

"It is most too chilly for you, good folk," said Annys kindly, as she poured out a glass of beer; "will you not enter awhile?"

"Nay, thank you," answered the sturdy man somewhat shortly, then added, "we came on an errand to Mrs. Annys Pennyfeather."

"To me?" cried Annys; "who then sent you?"

"As we passed a cottage some fifteen minutes' walk from here, a woman came hurriedly out and begged us if we were passing Master Pennyfeather's house to call and ask Mistress Annys, his daughter, of her charity to hasten thither, for her child was sore taken with some complaint, of which she described the symptoms,

but by my troth I forget how they went. She said none but you knew how to cure the child."

"Alack! that must be Widow Janson's child; I marvel me, however, for the child was healthful enough yesterday; howbeit, I will hasten at once."

"Then we will on our way," said the man indifferently; "but thou, boy, run back and say the lady comes anon."

"Nay, trouble not the boy," said Annys; but before the words were out of her mouth the boy was running in the direction of the cottage and the two men had moved away. The maiden quickly re-entered the hall, and going up to Jacob, whispered, "Widow Janson has sent for me to hasten to her sick child; it is not dark, so I will be back before any have noticed my absence. Nay, thou must not come, dear Jacob; it would never do for thy poor arm. Ah! I can command thee now!"

"As thou wilt, mine Annys; but who brought the message?"

"The singers, but they have passed on. Adieu for half-an-hour!"

Annys hastened away, and a few minutes after Jacob saw her trip off on her deed of charity. He may perhaps be forgiven for thinking that his Annys was nothing more nor less than an angel. The room, though full of people, seemed to Jacob to become suddenly empty, and he began to think of the gathering gloom. Why had he let Annys go alone? It was near, certainly, but a message sent by minstrels sounded strange. The more he thought the more impatient he grew, till after ten minutes' reflection he could bear it no longer, so with difficulty pulling a cloak over his shoulders, and his great hat on his head, he slipped out upon the white snowy ground. He had not walked more than a few paces when he espied a large knotted stick on the path; he

stooped down and picked it up, murmuring, "It is fortunate my right arm is not damaged; I fancy it could defend Annys better than those poor feeble things which that Rowland Whyte called his arms!" This you will notice was truly a lover's boast, and as such should be forgiven. For five minutes Jacob amused himself by following exactly the two small footprints of his love, then he took another fright, he knew not why, and hastened on quicker. At last the cottage light could be seen to glimmer: it was at the entrance of a small wood and solitary. About a hundred yards from the cottage Jacob saw with much surprise that the snow was much trodden down, as if several men had been trampling it, and beyond this he lost sight of the small footprints. A cold sweat burst out all over him. What did this mean? or was his mind going? He ran to the cottage and hammered at the door with his fist, which soon brought a poor woman to the sill.

"Quick, woman; say, has Mistress Annys Pennyfeather been to see thy sick child?"

"Aye, sir! that she has many and many a time; 'twas last Michaelmas when Betty took a strange complaint in her head, and was that wayward—"

"Peace about last Michaelmas; has she been here *this* night to thy sick child, I ask thee again?"

"Ah! sir, I pray you calm your mind, I meant no offence; but thank God, my child—but I have two, sir—is as hearty as she has ever been. That is to say Betty, but Tom is but sadly; only you see, sir, he's at Lisbon on some ship of her gracious—"

But the distracted Jacob had already strode back to the place where the footprints had paused. As he strained his eyes close to the beaten snow, he suddenly noticed that several fresh marks, entering the wood, were visible. He followed them, though nearly

driven mad by the idea that he was going the wrong way. However, Annys had been gone so short a time she could not be far off; if this path failed, he would return and seek everywhere. Very soon the narrow path broadened, and it entered a large green road which was the public way for carriages going through the wood. Jacob knew all these paths by heart, otherwise he might easily have lost his way. After some ten minutes' walk the road turned an angle, and what was then Jacob's surprise to see round the corner of the fir-path a rude, covered litter placed on the snow, about half-a-dozen men standing round it, and Annys, his Annys, leaning against a fir-tree, whilst a man well muffled up, seemed to be earnestly entreating her. Jacob's first impulse was to rush up and deal blows with his stick on the head of all seven, but a moment's reflection showed him that he would be immediately overpowered, and thus not save Annys. Ah! it was some vile plot of that rascal Rowland Whyte. Jacob had not been seen, so with stealthy steps he crept in and out among the trees till he came within ear-shot. Annys was saying—

"No, I tell you again, Mister Rowland Whyte, I would rather die of cold than enter the litter of my own free will; if you touch me I will scream, and there are some who could hear." Rowland smiled.

"Nay, sweet dove, ruffle not your feathers; hark you, I know something which would be the cause of a Pennyfeather seeing the inside of a prison; but should you consent to what I have prayed of you, not a hair of their head shall be touched—I mean your parents." Annys half uttered a little cry of pain, but stopping herself, she answered—

"I do not believe one word you say, and again I say no."

Jacob could stand this no longer; with the agility for which

he was famous, he suddenly sprang upon the astonished Rowland, dealt him a blow which sent him reeling a few paces, then seizing Annys by the hand, said—

"Quick, follow me, they will not be able to find my track."

Before the astonished followers of Rowland had made out what had happened, not a trace of Jacob and his betrothed could be seen through the dark pine stems, then their first thought was to pick up their fallen leader, who, being only stunned, soon returned to consciousness, saying, as he did so—"Ah! ah! I will be revenged for this; but come, fellows, why do you stand staring at me; away with you, and seek the pair. I care not what you do to the vile Puritan, but hurt not the maiden! I will recover anon, and walk home."

By this time Jacob was safely hidden in a little cave which no one but himself knew, and where, leaning against a stone, he was trying to soothe the frightened Annys. Her head was on his shoulder, and though the darkness hid her pale cheeks, Jacob's heart was rent by hearing her frightened sobs.

"My treasure, why distress thyself now? Art thou not safe with my arms round thee? Nay, nay, think not of the villain; he cannot get thee here, though, had not I followed thee, I tremble at the danger thou mightest have gone through."

"Nay, Jacob, he might have killed me, but I would not have moved. I feared him, oh! so much, but I would not show it; but ah! Jacob, how I prayed. Never in my life have I prayed as I did then. Think you he will be revenged on my father?"

"Fear nothing, sweetheart, Jacob has still one arm to protect thee and thine with; but come, the danger is past, it is already dark, and the household will be alarmed." So saying, Jacob gave her his unhurt arm and tenderly conducted her back to Sandy's

Hollow. Their absence had been remarked, and some jokes bandied about on the occasion; but Dame Pennyfeather, thinking Annys had, without leave, joined Jacob, was preparing a severe reproof, had not Jacob whispered in her ear—

"Say nothing, I beseech you; Annys has been in danger. I will tell you all anon." Eve's tongue had not yet learnt restraint.

"Ah, Annys, had the pastor been here, he would not have allowed thee thy evening walk."

"Poor pastor!" said Annys. "Ah, Jacob, I would give all I had, except thee, to see him here once more in the midst of us."

"And to hear him say how sinful we all were, dancing when we should be sleeping. Alas! Gog and Magog!" and Eve wagged her head slowly in imitation of the pastor; all near her, except Jacob and Annys, laughed. This latter remarked gently—

"Eve, it is not right to make a mock of thy elders; perhaps trouble will some day teach thee forbearance;" but the incorrigible sister only tossed her pretty head.

CHAP. X.—A PENNYFEATHER IN PRISON.

NO one can depict the rage of Master Pennyfeather when the next day Jacob related what had taken place on the previous evening. He raved against Rowland Whyte, swore that he had harboured a viper in his house, and concluded by saying—

"I knew well he would do me some ill turn, when he walked out of my house with the air of a king. Aye, aye, a king forsooth; he should be broken on a wheel if I had my pleasure."

"Calm thyself, Benjamin," said the dame, who was so busy putting away all her best possessions that she had not had much time to think of Annys' affairs, except that she had told her this would be a lesson against believing all the wandering minstrels who came to the door. Annys was too happy to care much what was said to her; to-day she was all anxiety about Jacob's arm, which the cold air had not improved. The yeoman insisted that the brave Puritan should remain a few days longer with them, and was generous enough not even to mention the mill stream, for which forbearance Annys inwardly thanked him.

"Indeed, Master Pennyfeather," remarked Jacob one day as the two men were sitting over the fire, when the rest of the household had retired to bed, "I know well I am in no way worthy of your daughter, but she will never find any who will

love her as much, not even if he were the queen's chancellor to boot."

"Aye, aye, man, thou hast proved thy words, and so that she turn not Puritan, I shall be right glad to see her in thy keeping."

"That is what I wanted to speak about. As long as she was not mine I would not declare my sentiments; some might have said of Jacob Buckston that he turned in order to marry pretty Mistress Annys, but now it is otherwise. I tell you plainly, sir, I am sick of the underhand ways our people employ, and am determined to give them up. My father will be angry, but I must endure that for Annys' sake."

"Well, well, Jacob, every one must have some craze or other, and that is thy father's, not forgetting either the mill stream." In this way the two became fast friends, and all animosity seemed to have been burned out on the night of the fire. A week had scarcely passed, however, when one morning as the family were assembled for breakfast, Amelia ran in looking much alarmed and flurried.

"Alack! what is going to befall us; I see a party of soldiers coming round the road! They are coming to kill us."

"Silence, wench! they will not trouble themselves about killing thee, methinks," said the dame sternly. "It is but a party going to change a garrison. Benjamin, thou had best stand at the door and bid them welcome."

"Certainly!" answered the yeoman, starting up from his chair, and so great was the excitement that Eve and Ben, even Maurice, hastily followed him. The report was true enough. Half-a-dozen soldiers, with an officer at their head, were slowly making their way along the road leading to one side of the farm. Very

soon all the party clattered into the yard, and the officer alighted as Master Pennyfeather said with jocund mien—·

"Welcome, brave gentlemen, to my poor home; you will certes do me the favour to dismount and breakfast with a loyal subject of her most gracious—"

"Come, come, good sir, it is too late to hoodwink us any longer. I bring here a warrant empowering me to seize you, and I shall hand you over to the civil authorities to be tried according to law."

The dismay depicted on all the Pennyfeather faces cannot easily be described. On the yeoman's countenance consternation soon gave place to wrath. His face became crimson, he clenched his fists, and looked ready to do battle.

"How, now sir, what do you mean by coming to insult me in my own house? Aye, me, a Pennyfeather to deliver myself over into the hands of justice: this is some vile plot." The noise brought the rest of the household to the door, and great was the distress of the worthy dame on hearing the cause.

"Good sirs, there must be some mistake about this; a slight explanation will clear the mystery. My husband is a most loyal subject. I pray you, tell us what is his fault?"

"Madam, I fear there is no mistake in the matter; your husband is accused by a most honourable gentlemen, Mr. Rowland Whyte, who can bring forth witnesses to bear out his statement."

At this the yeoman's passion burst forth:—"Then it is deep conspiracy, a pack of lies, a—a—a—."

"Come, sir," said Maurice, "what is then the accusation? it will be easy to refute it, there is none so honest and loyal in the land."

"Aye, aye! the law will find that out. Master Pennyfeather is accused of countenancing and upholding the vile and treasonous sect of Puritans, nay, of attending, or at least some of his family,

their secret meetings—all such have been declared by Her Gracious Majesty the Queen to be traitors, and therefore to be imprisoned. If the accusation be false, doubtless all will soon be cleared up."

"Neither I nor one of mine have ever set foot in any of their secret holes," cried the yeoman; "it is false, utterly false."

"Aye, and a most wicked lie," returned the dame.

At this minute a cry was heard, and Eve, in floods of tears, threw herself on her father, and sobbed out—"It was me; I did it, good sir, take not my father! I went with my brother, but it was only a frolic, my father knew it not—take me, take me; alack, alack!" and the miserable girl wrung her hands in her despair.

"Thou, Eve, and Ben?" said the yeoman calmly, as if struck dumb.

"Thou art not my daughter," said the dame, "to have brought this trouble upon me;" but now Jacob stepped forward and confronted the officer:—"I cannot believe that some child's frolic could influence the law, it is impossible."

"Who knows?" said the officer, shrugging his shoulders; "if the child owns to the deed, doubtless the father also assisted. The judge will soon find out. Come, sir, no more tarrying, we have some way to go, I advise you to mount one of your horses."

Eve sobbed as if her heart would break; this infected the twins, who joined their voices to hers; the dame herself looked ready to give way, but Maurice had taken hold of her arm and was giving her support and comfort. Annys stood pale, motionless, and mute, near Jacob, thinking that if her father was suspected, who had never set foot in a Puritan meeting-house, how much more might Jacob, who had been a declared Puritan? But what could she do? poor, weak, timid, little Annys, though her woman's heart was so large that she would willingly have suffered in the place of those

she loved. As to Master Pennyfeather himself, he stood up calm and brave, now that he knew the worst, and really behaved like the innocent man that he was, though many guiltless people similarly situated have found this line of action impossible. The horse was procured, and the yeoman mounted as if he were going to market, then turning towards his assembled family he said—

"It becometh you not, my children, to grieve for me as if I were to blame. Cheer up, dear heart, take care of the children—my little ones especially. Eve, I forgive thy frolic, but may thy future ones not bring forth such evil fruit. Maurice, bide for the present at home. Ah! Jacob, I need say nothing to thee, I will trust my treasure to thy safe keeping.—Now, gentlemen, I am ready to do your pleasure."

In this manner Master Pennyfeather quitted his home, leaving behind him many aching hearts who could hardly brook to see him guarded by a soldier on each side. Poor Eve ran away to her room directly the last had been seen of her father, and throwing herself on the floor, found that she had now plenty of time to repent. It was not only the disobedience of going out at night which had brought on this trouble, for at the bottom of her heart Eve guessed that Silent Joe must have been the informant. Had she not helped to undermine his truth and honour; had she not allowed him to be blamed unjustly, and held out hopes which she knew would not be realized, as baits for her own convenience? If repentance such as Eve's is blessed and salutary, surely it is far better to follow conscientiously each right impulse, as did Annys, even though at the time more pain than profit be the result. The dame had her household duties as usual to perform, and she was not the woman to sit down and weep when there was work to do; but Annys and Jacob retired to an

empty room to talk over what was best to be done, or indeed if there was anything to do.

"Alas! Jacob, I fear it is all my fault, but thou wilt believe me when I tell thee I gave him no encouragement. My father could not discern Rowland Whyte's flattering to mean nothing. He cared not for me, I feel sure."

"Nay, there perhaps may lie his only virtue. To see thee, Annys, is to love thee, so I cannot blame him for that; but his conduct deserves no pity. As to thy father, my one hope is that he may meet with the pastor, who would not fail to clear him. Ah! poor man, he was a right honest fellow, though he could see but one path."

"That business of Eve's was indeed unfortunate, but who could have informed against her? thou told'st me none recognized her."

"Aye, none did; I would take my oath of that, but that we care not about such things; an honest man's word suffices."

"Yes, thine, my Jacob, but here comes Eve; I pray thee, scold her not, she looks sad enough, our merry Eve."

It was indeed Eve, who had come to confess everything. She had now found her courage, and she would no longer spare herself. She told Jacob all that she had done, adding—"Ah! Jacob, if I had heeded you when you spoke of truth, I should not now be so unhappy. I shall never, never smile again."

This announcement brought smiles on the faces of the other two, and Annys, tenderly putting her arm round Eve's neck, said—"Cheer up, my dear little sister, our father forgave, and who then will dare to blame thee? Dry thy sweet eyes, and give us one of thy smiles, despite thy vow."

Eve could not resist this appeal, and from this day forth she looked upon Annys as nothing less than a saint.

CHAP. XI.—"THE QUEEN IS COMING!"

ALL seemed changed at Sandy's Hollow when the master of the house was gone. In the evening, when the great logs were put on the fire, there was no cheerful gathering round the great open chimney. Maurice would pore over a book. Annys, sitting near Jacob, would cry half the evening, with an occasional smile, however, when her lover whispered some tender words in her ears. Eve seldom laughed now; she found it hard to bear the reproachful looks of her mother, who, though never blaming her by word, yet punished her much more severely by her marked indifference. Eve could have borne anything better than that, though after all it was the very medicine needful to cure the girl's self-will and conceit. The dame did not speak about her husband, she kept all her grief locked up from the gaze of her children, but her worn, stern face told better than anything else how much she suffered. It was now two months since Master Pennyfeather had ridden away, and nothing had yet been heard of him. One evening Annys said—

"I think I will go and seek for my father, surely somewhere news might be heard of him. Maurice, what say you, no one would hurt a weak maiden like myself?"

"Annys, thou hast after all more courage than we deemed; but what would Jacob say to thy pilgrimage?"

"It is impossible, I expect news daily. However, if it will ease Annys' mind, I will myself ride over to D——, where I expect he will have been lodged," answered Jacob.

"Ah! Jacob, thirty miles, nay, that would take thee two days! If any trouble overtook us we should miss you sorely." At this speech Maurice looked somewhat indignantly at his sister.

"How now, sweet sister, thinkest thou that because I came from college I am no man, and cannot defend my kith?"

"Nay, Maurice, but yet—" The truth was Annys did not wish Jacob to absent himself; she was becoming fearful now about the absence of those she loved. Dame Pennyfeather was, however, most anxious that Jacob should go to the town of D——, and so without further delay he declared his intention of starting the next morning. Almost before the dame had risen from her bed, Annys was tenderly filling a leathern bag with provisions for her lover's journey. He was fastening up his long buskins, and seeing to his horse. At last the moment for saying good-bye was come, and Annys threw herself weeping into his arms.

"Ah! my heart misgives me, Jacob, when I see thee going away. Nothing but misfortune has of late fallen to our share, but if ought happened to thee I feel my heart would break."

"Nay, my Annys, that is having but little faith in Providence. A man must do his duty, he cannot do more or less, and the rest he must needs leave to God. Keep a good heart, and all will come right." So saying, he kissed the pale face he loved so dearly and rode off, leaving Annys very sad and heavy hearted.

"Alas! when will he come again?" said she, as she turned into the great hall, now desolate indeed for her.

When the breakfast was ready, it was discovered that Ben was missing, and the dame immediately began to fear some evil. Eve,

however, was able to relieve her anxiety, saying she had seen him go out early in the morning. Very soon a noise was heard, and the dame forgot to chide her rough boy when he rushed into the room, so thankful was she to behold him.

"Mother! Annys, Eve, guess the joyful news I bring you!"

All exclaimed with one breath, "Father is coming!"

"Nay, I had forgotten him for the minute, but some one will pass over against the road up yonder this very day. Aye, and the sun is coming out. Oh! what a fine sight!"

"But who then?" said Annys.

"No other than the queen herself; fancy, mother! The queen will pass by on her way to Cowdry, and they say it will be a right fine sight. I have just now seen a wooden railing rudely put up to prevent the village people from pressing too closely on Her Majesty. Eve, wilt thou come and see it?—I mean, may she come, mother?"

"Yes, yes, if she has a heart for fine sights. My heart is but ill-tuned for such festive pageants. Howbeit, Eve has my permission to go where she lists now; it will hurt no one." Eve hung her head and said nothing, but Annys replied—

"Dear mother! I will myself take the children there if thou wilt let me: it would be a pity to miss such a sight."

For all reply the stern dame put her apron over her eyes and wept silently. Children can never grieve for long together, and though Ben was sorry enough about his father, yet the news of this morning had greatly restored his spirits.

"Annys, if thou come at all thou must come early to get good places. The queen will pass at mid-day, and there will certainly be a scramble for the foremost places. I shall go now."

"As thou wilt; but I will come anon with Eve and the little

ones." So saying, Annys went upstairs to perform her usual household duties. Her mind was, however, deeply occupied with one thought. She had heard so much good spoken of Her Majesty. Was she not considered to be her people's friend? was she not always saying that she wished for their welfare? if so, then surely if Annys threw herself on her knees before her, she would listen to her and hear her petition. She would explain that it was a vile conspiracy which had but too well succeeded in depriving them of their father. She knew her mother would pine away her life; although she said nothing, Annys could see she suffered dreadfully. But on the other hand, how could she, a quiet timid maiden, find courage enough to stop the royal procession? How would she bear to find all eyes turned upon her? and what would Jacob say, he who was so particular about a maiden's behaviour? For a few minutes her heart failed her, then she thought again about her mother. Suppose the yeoman could not clear himself, suppose he should be kept for years in prison, or be put to the torture, and forced to confess what he had never done. Horrible thought! surely she would conquer her nerves to prevent, if possible, such a fate befalling her father. The queen was not so uncaring of her people as to reject a suit which was so righteous. Annys, as she dressed herself in her simplest clothes, made up her mind to offer her petition; even if she did no good she would have done her best to save her father. She, however, kept her plans to herself, and about eleven o'clock she started forth, accompanied by Eve and the children, to the spot indicated by Ben. Maurice cared not to go, but stayed with his mother and tried to replace his father at the farm.

It was indeed a beautiful day; a warm early spring had caused the earth to put on a pretty green mantle of leaves; the birds rejoiced at the departure of the winter, and every living thing was

making itself happy; that is to say, all living things which had not a heart where trouble and disappointment had entered in to lodge, for in such hearts it is always winter, and a chill wind seems for ever to be blowing. When Annys arrived great preparations had already been made, and the wooden railings were supporting the weight of many a sturdy youth and buxom maid. Even old folks of both sexes were there, and some strong men had left their work to catch a glimpse of the great queen. It is weary work waiting in a crowd, but besides this there is much inconvenience to be borne with patience. The strong will push the weak, the children will get between the legs of the men, and then insist on lifting up their voices in order to get their parents to take them in their arms or settle them on their shoulders. Now and then some lucky man would come riding up near the crowd, upon which would follow some screams of women, who feared to be trampled down by the quiet gray mare who was on the point of falling asleep. It was through this crowd that Annys forced her way up to Ben; she had begged Eve to mind the little ones, and Eve, unlike her usual self, was glad enough to stay in the rear and look after her sisters, though she much marvelled at Annys' unwonted curiosity. Annys felt her heart sink as the minutes wore on, and when a body of Lances came to station themselves at intervals along the railings she knew the queen was not far off. Her pale face excited the compassion of a kind woman, who, with a babe in her arms, stood beside her. "Thou lookest ill, mistress," she said kindly; "why not lean against the wood?" Annys smiled and said she was not ill, but only sick at heart with trouble. At this minute there was a movement in the crowd, and simultaneously everyone exclaimed, "The queen is coming!" All necks were stretched forward to see, but no dust, no soldiers were visible; only with a

frightened "miau" a poor cat rushed across the road. Ben immediately laughed heartily, and the laugh was taken up with increased merriment among the crowd. Next time, however, that some voice cried "The queen is coming!" no one looked much interested till the tread of horses advancing with slow measured paces was distinctly heard. This time the queen was really at hand. When Her Majesty showed herself to her subjects she wished them to see a good deal of her pomp; and she arranged her processions so well that it was, as Ben had predicted, a very fine sight to see first her retinue and then the royal person herself. First came twenty-four gentlemen of rank riding on white horses, then some knights of the Garter richly dressed. To-day even the chancellor, bearing the seals in a red silk purse, was riding in front of the queen. She was seated in an open carriage, and round her walked many gentlemen, whilst behind the carriage some dozen ladies, all sparkling with jewels and adorned with feathers, rode on white horses. But how shall I describe the queen? Her attire added greatly to her stateliness, but could hardly be said to enhance her personal appearance. Now she was no longer young; her face was fair and oblong; her eyes were small, yet they were pleasant and lively; her nose a little hooked, and her lips thin and compressed. Two goodly pearls were attached to her ears, which were but partially covered by false red hair. As to her jewels, a pen would fail to describe their number, size, and brilliancy. The morning sun illuminated the silver thread which bordered her rich silk mantle and white brocade dress, and made her diamond necklace to appear as if on fire. How the crowd gazed at all these wonderful things! but Annys saw none of them. When the queen was yet a few yards back, the maiden could catch a glimpse of the well-shaped proud head; she could see that as the queen turned her gracious looks, all

knees were bent to the ground, and many voices cried, "Long live the queen!" Annys saw everything, and yet she deemed herself sleeping and dreaming. Slowly the cortége advanced: the woman with the baby in her arms stretched her head forward and then fell on her knees, crying, "God save the queen!" adding in a whisper, "Kneel, mistress; know you not it is the queen herself? I pray you kneel; she will see you." Annys stooped her pretty head, bent her knees, but with another purpose in her mind. Just as the queen was fronting the spot, a maiden was seen suddenly to dart from under the railing, and pushing gently past the lance, throw herself on her knees before the royal carriage, saying in a low clear voice,

"Pardon, gracious majesty! pardon for my father!" There was a murmur of surprise among the crowd; the queen looked down and beheld the kneeling figure whom the gentlemen were trying to push away. She had not heard the words Annys had spoken, but seeing the gentlemen proceed to force her away without her orders, she said in a commanding voice, "Gentlemen, I pray you stop! Methinks it is unseemly to use violence towards one of my subjects, and that a tender maiden, without any word from me!" The gentleman at the head of the company looked abashed, though he knew full well that on every other occasion the queen had strictly commanded that no one should be allowed to stop her progress by presenting petitions unless her express commands were given. Her Majesty then waving her hand, caused the way to her carriage to be cleared, and bending forward, asked why the maiden had impeded her progress. Annys could scarcely answer; her tongue faltered, but summoning all her courage, she said, "I ask but a simple boon from your highness. My father has been taken from his home on a false accusation of conspiring

with the Puritans. One word from you, gracious lady, would release him from—"

"We think thee over bold, maiden, but honour thy daughter's heart. Thy name, child?"

"Annys Pennyfeather," said the maiden simply. There was a titter heard from the ladies who rode behind. One even whispered loud enough to reach the queen's ears—

"That name would sound strange at court. It would take two dainty mouthfuls."

The queen looked sternly towards the whisperer as she answered right graciously, "Maiden, thy petition is granted; the matter shall be looked into: if it be as thou sayest, justice shall be done." The speech was meant to be heard by the crowd, but it was none the less gratifying to the timid Annys. The multitude immediately shouted aloud, "Long live the queen! God bless Her Majesty, the friend of her people!"

"If it please your majesty to grant one other boon," murmured Annys, still kneeling, although the gentlemen, impatient at the delay, tried to close round the carriage.

"How! what further, wench? Thou art not easily satisfied." The queen's voice had lost the tone of condescension; she, too, thought it was time to move on.

"There is a poor Puritan pastor who is as harmless as a dove. He is retained in prison, but surely there can be naught against him which, if your majesty knew, she would not pardon."

"What! thou art begging for a Puritan; thou, a loyal maiden! This is strange. I deem thy father is not so innocent as thou wouldst make him. Enough, enough!" and with a wave of her hand, the queen commanded the procession to continue its course, leaving poor Annys bitterly regretting her too great boldness.

She could not remember how she got back to the railings, but even then she was not left alone. Everyone wished to see the maiden who had been courageous enough to stop the royal carriage. Some admired her, some blamed her, others said it was some conspiracy. In the midst of the confusion Eve came up to her sister, and taking her by the arm, said in a loud voice,

"Annys is my sister, and I know there is none like her in all the land! Come, sweet heart, this way; we shall be soon out of the crowd if thou follow me." Annys obeyed the younger sister, who indeed looked equal to be anybody's champion, with her flashing eyes and commanding manner. Soon they found themselves in their own meadows, and alone, Ben having taken the twins back to the house. "Ah, Annys! how brave, how good thou art! I hope indeed thou wilt never go to court. I heard those proud women laugh at thee. What made thee think of doing such a thing? Annys, art thou ill? how pale thou art!"

"Nay, but I fear it was in vain."

"Well, I think not; the queen, they say, will lodge this night at D——, and she may perchance hear of the matter, then thy sweet face will come back to her remembrance."

"God grant it may be so! Surely when the storm is darkest then the rainbow must be visible somewhere. But say nothing to our mother: we will wait till Jacob comes back."

"If my father should not be released, Annys, I think I shall die of grief. I am thinking of him all day long." So saying, Eve wiped away some tears, usually strange visitors to the merry girl, and then both the sisters walked home silently together.

CHAP. XII.—"ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL."

A WEEK had passed, and had brought neither news from Master Pennyfeather nor the return of Jacob Buckston. Old Farmer Buckston himself had become anxious about his son, and had tottered up to Sandy's Hollow to see Dame Pennyfeather. He was surprised to see the change that had taken place in her. She was now much softened by her troubles. After having silently borne them for some time, she had at last given way, and found her only consolation in talking ceaselessly about her husband to Maurice, Annys, and even Eve.

"Look you, Dame Pennyfeather," said Farmer Buckston, leaning on his stick and shaking his white head, "if ever the master comes back, and to my thinking he never will, I will say nothing more about that mill-stream you and he wot of. These are evil days; the Philistine is scattering the true Israelite, and who knows where a Samson can be found! There is the good Mr. Hapgood languishing in prison, and my arm is not strong enough to wield an ox-goad. But I was forgetting you are still in darkness, and have not yet sought the light. Jacob, too, is a sad renegade. My old years have fallen in evil roads."

"That will be cheering news for my father when he does come

"ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL".

back!" cried Maurice; "so you really do give up the old mill-stream fight?"

"I said not so," answered the farmer; "I did but say I would say no more about it, but the quarrel, should all go well again, will be the same as before. Tut, man, what is life without some bone of contention? Jacob and I have always some topics which we differ upon."

At this moment a trampling of horses was heard. The dame, as usual, started forward; she was always expecting some one who might tell her about her husband. The rest of the family had also heard them, for Annys and Eve both ran with their brother out into the court-yard. Annys was the first to speak.

"Look, look along the road! I am sure it is Jacob's form."

"And I," said Maurice, "could almost swear my father was with him; but say nothing till we are sure." A few minutes more and their guesses were changed into realities. True enough Jacob and Master Pennyfeather were urging their horses forward, and almost before the dame could reach the door-way she found herself clasped in her husband's arms, upon which the stern lady began to cry, and so much surprised him that he walked two paces back.

"Upon my oath, this is the first time I have ever seen thee cry, sweet wife. Ah, ah, ah! well, well; some have strange ways of showing their joy. There, too, is my Annys. Ah, child! we have some things to tell thee. What! here is Eve in tears; wonders are not at an end. Ah! Farmer Buckston, you have your son and I have mine now; how are you?"

"Well, I must say, Master Pennyfeather, I did not expect you home so soon, or I would have said nothing about the mill-stream; but I suppose what is said cannot be unsaid, so I fear there is an end of that."

Everyone laughed heartily, and then they plied the two travellers with questions. Annys could see no one now but Jacob, and had they been separated ten years their happiness at meeting each other again could not have been greater. At last the yeoman said—

"Come in, my children, and Jacob will tell you his story, which is more amusing than mine: my tale will keep for some winter's night. Here, Jacob, take this seat and tell thy tale."

"I reached D——," began Jacob, "with but few adventures, and those few were neither pleasant nor exciting; such as my mare falling lame, and getting myself robbed of my purse. Ah! I meant not to tell thee, Annys, but the cat is out of the bag, and thou mayest keep the money when thou art my wife. Arrived at the town, I inquired at the inn if ought had been heard of the queen's visit, whether she had inquired about the Puritan prisoners said to be lodged in the town. The landlord was a sour, ill-favoured looking man, and answered but meagerly to my questions, saying the prisoners were not there, but had been taken to Melsham. This discomforted me a good deal, that town being full ten miles further on; but as my horse was spent, I rolled myself in a coat and said I would rest a bit by the fire. Toward nine o'clock there entered a man who called for his supper. I thought I knew his voice, but could not for some time recollect where I had heard it. At last, when he had eaten and drunk heartily, he became talkative with the landlord, and said he must travel this night to Melsham, for he was wanted the next morning to give evidence against some Puritan traitors; then I saw that I was in company with none other than your old farm man, Silent Joe. You may be sure I said not a word, but determined to keep my eye on him. When he rose to go I did the same, and taking the road which he chose I waited till we had reached a lonely wood, then sticking my spurs into my

mare's flanks, I soon was alongside of him. He had quite lost his speechlessness, but had not also doffed his foolish air.

"'Good evening to you, Silent Joe,' said I; 'methinks it is not quite safe to be so near Sandy's Hollow; it is well known who burned that wing, and the authorities are seeking thee!' He turned quite pale and tried to deny the fact, but I continued—'Look you, my fine fellow, when we reach Melsham I will deliver you up to justice, till then you and I travel together.' You should have seen how he showed his mind then, begged me to say nothing about it, and at last I said that if he liked to turn his horse's head and go back to where he came from I would certainly not follow him, as I had business of my own. He was very loath to do so, but at last he did, and sulked away into the darkness. To cut a long story short, I heard when I reached Melsham that the queen had sent an order to the effect that Benjamin Pennyfeather was at once to be examined, and if his judges could find nothing against him he was to be released. This order had much astonished the officials, who knew not how Her Majesty could have made herself acquainted with the name and offence of the prisoner. I took care to render myself at the court for the trial, and I was rejoiced to see your father come forward, led by two men, but looking well and cheerful."

"Aye, aye, that was but to spite them," put in the yeoman.

"The trial proceeded; I kept myself in the back-ground, when I saw no other but Rowland Whyte come up and bear witness against his kinsman; he accused him of conspiring against the queen, of going to secret meetings, and I know not what else, adding that one of the yeoman's own men was coming, or should be there at this minute to uphold him. It was altogether a lame story, and I laughed in my sleeve, knowing well that Joe would certainly

be 'silent' this day. The judge said he could find no real ground for detention, adding that Her Majesty the Queen had ordered the prisoner's immediate release, without further trial. You should have seen Rowland's face when I came forward, and addressing your father, told him I had come to escort him home."

"Come, Jacob, what a long story when the best is yet to come; thou must let me tell the rest."

Jacob smiled assent and the yeoman took up the thread of the story.

"We had reached a wood (the same in which Jacob met Joe), when we suddenly heard despairing shouts for help. In an instant we turned our horses' heads towards the spot and saw several ruffians attacking a gentleman in gay attire. He had his back against a tree and was hallooing like a boy. Jacob flew to the rescue, and I did the little I could. We were now three to four, and if the gallant would have used his weapons somewhat better it would have been quick work. However, seeing we were getting the upper hand, the four rascals took to their heels, not before one craven found the means, however, of having a pistol-shot into the midst of us. The gallant screamed like a woman, and then fainted. It was almost dark, so it was not till Jacob fetched his tinder-box that we were able to recognize Rowland Whyte. When he recovered his senses he saw my face, and looked vastly ashamed, poor fellow! We asked him whether he was hurt, and he groaned and said that indeed he felt himself dying. Well, we got him to the inn, where he insisted on getting pen, ink, and paper, and deposing to the four who had assaulted him. Poor fellow, we could not leave him, though I thought but slightly of his wound. His fine manners fell off like a snake's skin, and below the boy was not so bad. Eh, Jacob?"

"Nay, nay, I will say nought against him, though I found it hard to forgive him concerning Annys."

"Where is he now?" inquired the dame.

"Jacob sent a man to warn his uncle of the accident, but before he came the poor boy was dead. By my faith, though, I think he died of fright more than of his wound. He sent some foolish token to thee, Annys, and asked my pardon in a right Christianly fashion. Well, well, I bear him no grudge; a Pennyfeather can make himself happy even in prison."

Annys was shedding tears over the death of the man she had never loved, but soon looked up to ask—

"Father, what about the pastor, was he not released?"

"Nay, not yet, my brave girl; a friend of his came to see him, however, and told us the history of Mistress Annys Pennyfeather beseeching the queen! You should have seen his face, all of you! The poor man said that he could see Annys would still be converted to the right religion, and when I mentioned Jacob he added, 'Ah! I thought all would be well. Tell her that my fate matters not so that some are saved!' I had not the heart to tell him thou wast a renegade, Jacob. However, now that I know the inside of a prison, I will spare no pains to get poor Hapgood out of that dreadful den!"

"Didst thou have no feather-bed?" inquired Eve; upon which her father laughed so loud and so long that she thought her question had perhaps been foolish.

"If only the pastor were here we should be as of old," said Maurice.

"Nay, indeed, Maurice, I hope I am wiser and better," said Eve, humbly; "I shall always remember our troubles were brought on by me. But now father has come back, you will forgive me, will

you not, mother?" This appeal could not be rejected, and the yeoman added—

"Aye, aye, I did not think a Pennyfeather could have faults, but now I know better; let us hope the time will come when they will all be cured! But now let us be cheerful as becometh us. I prophesy that before the wing is built up we shall have the pastor once more teaching his wild pupils!"

. . . . . .

I have done my tale; it only remains to add a few facts which may not be without interest to those who have followed the fortunes of the Pennyfeathers. Old farmer Buckston died before the end of the year, and Jacob, now become the possessor of the farm, agreed that his wedding should take place on Midsummer-day, when he had put everything in order for his pretty bride; but it was settled that Jacob should come and spend Christmas-tide at Sandy's Hollow, to join in the festivities given in honour of the new wing being completed. Before that day arrived, Master Pennyfeather was able to get an order of release for Master Hapgood, who returned to his old lodgings at Butcher Roche's, after promising to have nothing more to do with the secret meetings of the Puritans.

"Let us all go this Christmas Eve and bid him welcome," cried the yeoman, when the pastor's arrival was made known to him, "and we must ourselves carry his Christmas dinner; I should guess his purse will not be too full." Accordingly the whole family started, Annys and the twins loaded with parcels. When they approached the butcher's shop they perceived him on his door-step as usual, watching eagerly the passers-by to see if "turkey" was written on their faces. As soon as the yeoman saw him he cried out—

"Aye, aye, my good Roche, you remember I owe you a turkey, and I hope this time you have the pastor in safe keeping!"

"Yes, yes, sir, he is safe enough, and I intend he should have a Christmas meal and no fasts this year. Ah! ah! ah! Look you, sir, he is a right good man, for he brought home the coat I lent him when he went, and has never so much as worn it once when he was freezing with cold in prison. I did chide him, but his answer was—'I felt sure, Roche, I never should be rich enough to give thee its equivalent in money,' yet the temptation must have been strong, for—"

"Come, come, we wish to see him, and not thy old coat," said the yeoman good-naturedly, and the whole party spent the rest of the day with their old friend, taking him back with them to Sandy's Hollow, in order to spend with them

A RIGHT MERRIE CHRISTMAS!

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